LANGUAGE AND POLITICS DURING THE CHINESE CULTURAL REVOLUTION: A STUDY IN LINGUISTIC ENGINEERING

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ABBREVIATIONS

CCP Documents	*CCP Documents of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution 1966-1967.* Union Research Institute, 1968.
LRB	'The Little Red Book' (*Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong.* Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1966).
OTD	*On the Docks: A Modern Revolutionary Opera* (English translation). Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1973.
PLA	People's Liberation Army.
RGP	*Red Guard Publications.* 20 vols. Photo offset from microfilm.

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INTRODUCTION

In the appendix to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, George Orwell imagined a future society in which everyone accepted the official ideology, and in which punishment and terror were unnecessary. Instead, people were kept under control because they spoke, heard, read and wrote only a single, specially contrived language - the language of Newspeak.

> Newspeak was the official language of Oceania and had been devised to meet the ideological needs of Ingsoc, or English Socialism. It was expected that Newspeak would finally have superseded Oldspeak (or Standard English, as we should call it) by about the year 2050....
>
> The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible. It was intended that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Oldspeak forgotten, a heretical thought - that is, a thought diverging from the principles of Ingsoc - should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words. Its vocabulary was so constructed as to give exact and often very subtle expression to every meaning that a Party member could properly wish to express, while excluding all other meanings and also the possibility of arriving at them by indirect methods. This was done partly by the invention of new words, but chiefly by eliminating undesirable words and by stripping such words as remained of unorthodox meanings, and so far as possible of all secondary meanings whatever. To give a single example. The word *free* still existed in Newspeak, but it could only be used in such statements as "This dog is free from lice" or "This field is free from weeds." It could not be used in its old sense of "politically free" or "intellectually free", since political and intellectual freedom no longer existed even as concepts, and were therefore of necessity nameless.
>
> ... A person growing up with Newspeak as his sole language would no more know that *equal* had once had the secondary meaning of 'politically equal', or that *free* had once meant 'intellectually free', than for instance, a person who had never heard of chess would be aware of the secondary meanings attaching to *queen* and *rook*. There would be many crimes and errors which it would be beyond his power to commit, simply because they were nameless and therefore unimaginable. [Orwell 1976 [1949], 917-18, 924].

This passage is not without theoretical problems and equivocations, but it raises important questions about the relationship of language to thought. It also captures the spirit, if not the details, of the type of linguistic engineering which is the subject of this thesis: the attempt to re-make people's minds through a comprehensive, centrally controlled programme of linguistic engineering.

Orwell's principal models were Nazi Germany and, more especially, the Soviet Union. The Newspeak of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was his imaginative extension of the officially approved language of those societies (cf. Steinhoff 1976). But in the very year in which the novel was published, there came into existence a society in which the control of language was even more comprehensive - the People's Republic of China. There, more determined attempts were made to extend the use of politicized language into people's private lives, and to turn the whole population into 'thought police' who monitored words to detect 'incorrect' thought.[1] These attempts reached their peak in the last ten years of Mao Zedong's rule, during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976. China was the laboratory in which Mao conducted easily the biggest experiment in linguistic engineering in world history, and perhaps the most rigorously controlled.[2] It is an ideal case study for scholars who are interested in the practice of linguistic engineering, and who wish to examine its effects on people's beliefs and ways of thinking.

In a loose sense, the term 'linguistic engineering' can be applied to any attempt to change language in order to affect attitudes and beliefs. In this sense, linguistic engineering probably exists in all societies. Its current manifestations in the English-speaking world

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[1]On linguistic engineering in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, see Young 1991. There is also relevant information in works like Zeman 1964 (on the Nazi Germany) and Benn 1989 (on the Soviet Union). Whyte 1974, ch. 3, shows that in the Soviet Union small group rituals (a crucial agent of linguistic engineering) were not extended to the general population.

[2]It is possible, of course, that there have been even more rigorous experiments in linguistic engineering, but they have not been sufficiently documented. Two cases which deserve investigation are North Korea and Pol Pot's Cambodia, although the existence of the latter was very brief (1975-79). Other possibilities, on a much smaller scale, include some religious sects and enclosed religious communities.

include new coinages and new applications of old words, as well as attempts to eradicate usages which are believed to underpin 'offensive' attitudes. So governments gloss over and excuse the deaths of civilians in war by describing them as 'collateral damage'; black Americans draw attention to their heritage by insisting that they be called 'African Americans'; those who have disabilities raise their status by becoming people with 'different abilities'; homosexuals escape medical/psychiatric definition and celebrate their lifestyle by becoming 'gays'; prostitutes assert the legitimacy of their way of making money by referring to themselves as 'sex workers'; and feminists demand a whole battery of changes to 'man made language', including stopping the use of 'man' as a generic term for human beings. In all these cases, linguistic innovation is intended to affect attitudes through what Deborah Cameron (1995) has called 'verbal hygiene'. In the case of disadvantaged minorities the goal is, more specifically, to introduce language which affords them respect, defined in their own terms, and to elevate their social status. As Dale Spender (1985, 6) says on their behalf, 'Investing the language with one's own different and positive meanings is a priority for all oppressed groups ... the language and its use has to be changed; there is no alternative if one seeks to throw off one's oppression.'

This type of linguistic engineering is worth serious study, but it is less far-reaching than the linguistic engineering which is the subject of this thesis. Even the feminist attack on sexist language is modest in its scope and minor in its consequences compared with the changes made by Mao Zedong and the Communist Party in China. Linguistic engineering in non-totalitarian societies is not under the control of the state, and even when it has political backing people are free to criticise it and usually to ignore it. Linguistic change is effected almost entirely by persuasion and social pressure, not by coercion, and it is often accompanied by heated debate and the persistence of rival usages. Attempts to tamper with language often fail, as with the many reforms proposed by the General Semantics movement (e.g. Korzybski 1933, Chase 1943), and even when attempts succeed they are frequently not adopted universally.

In China, by contrast, linguistic engineering was directed by Mao and the Communist Party, except during the early stages of the Cultural

Revolution when Mao dispensed with the Party. The changes in the Chinese language were immense, people were compelled to adopt them in all public contexts, and there were increasingly strenuous attempts to politicize private life and enforce the use of politicized language there as well. Linguistic engineering in China had two aspects:

1. *Reform of the lexicon and semantics.* This involved teaching people the numerous *neologisms* which were required for the 'correct' expression of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. It also involved *logocide* - the suppression of words which were tied to 'incorrect' thought; *semanticide* - abolishing old meanings and substituting new, revolutionary ones; and *linguistic resurrection* - the revival of traditional terms and their application to revolutionary contexts. These changes were not much different in form from those which occur as a result of piecemeal linguistic engineering in the West, but they reflected a single ideology and they were on a far grander scale.

2. *Enforcing the habitual use, in relevant contexts, of numerous fixed expressions which embodied 'correct' attitudes or which had 'correct' propositional content.* People were compelled to use these *linguistic formulae* when speaking or writing because it was believed that their message would sink into their brains and guide their behaviour. Failure to use the formulae when required was taken as a sign of 'incorrect' thought, as was their use in inappropriate contexts. A systematic attempt was made to extend the range of appropriate contexts as a way of politicizing not only public life, but also the routines of daily life, so that Chinese speech became heavily formulaic. This form of linguistic engineering is analogous to the use of religious formulae as means of persuasion in Western countries, but only in sects or religious orders which cut their members off from the world do the formulae penetrate so deeply into people's lives. People can usually leave or escape from these communities, and no group in the West has the power to enforce the use of linguistic formulae throughout the entire society. It is normally even possible to avoid singing the national anthem, and some people never manage to learn all the words.

It can be seen that linguistic engineering in China expressed the totalitarian aspirations of the communist rulers who took power in 1949. It involved the attempt to re-make people's minds by insisting that they participate more and more fully in *revolutionary discourse*, using revolutionary terms to say revolutionary things, participating in a discourse which was 'correct' both in *form* and in *content*.

The subject of this thesis is the revolutionary discourse created by linguistic engineers in Mao's China. Chapter 1 is an examination of theoretical issues in the linguistic and psychological literature which are relevant to linguistic engineering; chapter 2 traces the development of linguistic engineering in China down to the onset of the Cultural Revolution; chapters 3-8 examine different aspects of linguistic engineering during the Cultural Revolution, when revolutionary discourse was most rigorously enforced; chapter 9 assesses the successes and failures of Mao's great experiment in linguistic engineering; and chapter 10 draws out the implications of the Chinese experience for the wider topic of linguistic engineering.

A thesis on linguistic engineering is inevitably multi-disciplinary. From linguistics, it must incorporate insights and theory generated by scholars working on pragmatics, sociolinguistics and the relationship between language and thought; from psychology, it must utilize research relevant to language and attitudes conducted by cognitive, behaviourist and social psychologists; and from history and political science, it must take the skills required to trace the development of linguistic engineering in China, to place that development in its political and social context, and to assess the impact of linguistic engineering on different sections of the population at particular times.

Such a thesis must also use a considerable range of sources on language, politics and society in China. In a sense, my research for this thesis started in my youth, for I was eighteen when Mao Zedong died in 1976. Like other students of that era I was a product - albeit an imperfectly processed one - of linguistic engineering. The contextual knowledge which personal experience gives is invaluable, and memory can be a reliable source of information on matters which were part of the daily routine over many years. This, of course, includes many aspects of linguistic engineering, for the repetition of revolutionary

formulae, day in day out, was fundamental to the Maoist approach to persuasion. I can still recite parts of the 'Little Red Book', I can still remember all the common slogans, I still know the words of the song which accompanied the 'loyalty dance', and so on. For me, these were like the prayers, nursery rhymes and moral maxims of a Western childhood, and they are not easily forgotten, even by those who have abandoned the faith.

I am acutely aware, though, of the fallibility of individual memory. I have never relied upon memory for matters on which it is notoriously unreliable, such as chronology. Where I have used it, I have checked my recollections with friends and family members, mostly older than myself. On some topics - such as the language and procedure of the Public Criticism Meeting - I conducted careful interviews until I was satisfied that I had the details right. At most points, I have been able to supplement my own recollections with written sources. I have frequently cited the autobiographies of former Red Guards who have far more informative and reliable memories than I do of the Cultural Revolution's early years, especially the crucial period of 'free mobilization' from 1966 to 1968. I have been struck by how consistent they are in their recollections of language, of ritual, and of the impact of the 'big events' of the Cultural Revolution.

In dealing with language, I have been able to use original sources, selected to illustrate linguistic engineering in its diverse forms. They include the following: selected essays by Deng Tuo, together with the polemical attack on them by Yao Wenyuan which helped to popularize the interpretive assumptions which I analyse in chapter 3; a mass of Red Guard newspapers and leaflets collected in the multiple volumes of *Red Guard Publications*, which I found invaluable in chapter 5; the *People's Daily*, which was checked systematically between 1950 and 1980 in an effort to quantify the rise and fall of the cult of Mao's word (chapter 6); dictionaries, which were analysed to demonstrate a marked increase in the pervasiveness of revolutionary discourse during the Cultural Revolution (chapter 6); the model revolutionary opera *On The Docks*, whose language is analysed in chapter 7; my collection of the textbooks used to teach English in Chinese schools during and after the Cultural Revolution, which is the basis of chapter 8; and, of course,

Mao's own works, including the 'Little Red Book', which were the source of so much revolutionary discourse.

I have been fortunate to have the assistance of an excellent series of monographs on linguistic innovations in Mao's China produced by the Center for Chinese Studies at Berkeley from the 1950s to the early 1980s (Li 1956a, 1956b, 1957a, 1957b, 1958, 1962; Serruys 1962; Hsia 1961, 1963, 1964; Chuang 1967, 1968, 1970; Dittmer & Chen 1981). Empirically oriented, but with shrewd comment, they are based largely on a careful study of Chinese newspapers, which were a vital means of communicating official discourse to the cadres, who in turn disseminated it to the masses. These studies frequently jogged my memory, and on some points for the period before the Cultural Revolution they filled gaps in my knowledge. I have often given references to them even when they report linguistic usage which is familiar to all Chinese of my generation, so that readers can, if they wish, follow up the examples which they take from the Chinese press.

A study which places linguistic engineering in its context and assesses its effectiveness must make extensive use of the voluminous secondary literature on politics and society in Mao's China. Most of the sources cited in this thesis are in English, because publication on the Cultural Revolution is still restricted in China. However, there is a growing scholarly literature in Chinese which provides valuable insights, and I have found it especially useful for chapters 3 and 5. I believe that the literature now makes it possible to assess the effectiveness of Mao's experiment in linguistic engineering. It has begun to grapple with the implications of the disaster of the Great Leap Forward for peasant attitudes towards collectivist discourse and the Communist Party; it can take into account the astonishing rapidity with which so many Chinese cast aside key tenets of revolutionary discourse once Deng Xiaoping achieved power and eased restrictions; and it can take advantage of the fact that Deng's rise has allowed people to speak relatively openly about their experiences under Mao's rule. It is possible, at last, for those who lived through the Cultural Revolution to discover if their own experiences and their own views were typical. It is also possible to go beyond broad generalities about 'what people thought', and to distinguish between what *particular* groups thought on a *variety* of issues at *different* times. At last, then, we are in a position

to say something sensible about *which* aspects of Maoist discourse were accepted by *which* groups in *which* periods. This clears the way for a study of Mao's great experiment in linguistic engineering. It may also enable us to test some of the claims associated with Orwell's thesis that by controlling language we can control thought.

I

PRELUDE

CHAPTER 1

LINGUISTIC ENGINEERING: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Orwellian vision of a society in which Big Brother controls thought by manipulating language has intrigued countless people, and seemed plausible to many of them. It is sustained by three related beliefs about language and thought:

1. The assumption that we *think* in the language which we *speak*, whether it be Chinese, English or Swahili.

2. The proposition, associated in linguistics with Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, that the semantic categories and grammatical rules of the language which we speak determine or at least heavily influence the structure of our thought.

3. The claim that we communicate through a common linguistic code which enables speakers to pair thoughts with phonetic signals according to fixed semantic and syntactic rules, then lets addressees recover the thoughts simply by decoding the message.

In this chapter I will set out the theoretical framework of the thesis by addressing these claims, using them as a starting point for discussing the many ways in which language can, and cannot, be used to manipulate thought.

1.1 The Language of Speech and the Language of Thought

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Orwell rather hesitantly mentions a popular assumption which underpins the belief that by controlling language we can control people's thought:

> It was intended that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Oldspeak forgotten, a heretical thought - that is, a thought diverging from the principles of Ingsoc [English socialism] - should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words. (Orwell 1976 [1949], 917).

The crucial assumption - that we cannot entertain a thought which we cannot put into words - is expressed then quickly qualified by the caveat 'at least so far as thought is dependent on words.' Orwell did not follow up the implications of this caveat, beyond an indirect statement several pages later that thought without words would be 'vague' (Orwell 1976 [1949], 923). Few of his readers have even noticed his momentary doubt, in part because a good many of them actually believe, more firmly than Orwell did, that thought really *is* 'dependent on words'. That view was popularized by the founder of behaviourist psychology, John B. Watson (1930, cited Galotti 1994, 260), who asserted that when we think, we cannot do so without covert vocalization. More recently, the subordination of language to thought has drawn support from structuralist and post-structuralist emphasis on the priority of language, and from garbled versions of the Whorfian linguistic determinism discussed in the next section. Finally, some people have based their case on introspection, saying that when we try to 'inspect' our thoughts they appear to us in words.

But what if thought is not dependent on words? What if we do not think in the language which we speak, or in a language completely dependent on our spoken language? In that case, linguistic engineering will at best have an indirect influence on our thoughts, and banning people from using heretical language will not automatically lead to the slow extinction of heretical ideas. And indeed, modern linguists have generally rejected the view that we can think only in languages like Chinese or English which we use for communication. They have come up with some compelling arguments.

First, the claim that thought is merely covert vocalization has been refuted experimentally, at least in its Watsonian form. Smith, Brown, Toman and Goodman (1947, cited Galotti 1994, 260) conducted an experiment in which Smith was injected with a curare derivative which paralysed all his muscles. He had to be kept alive by a respirator, and

because his vocal chords no longer functioned he could not engage in covert speech. Could he still think? The answer was a decisive *yes*. He remained fully conscious and was able to report that his ability to think about and remember what was going on about him was unimpaired.

Second, if thought depends on the acquisition of the language which we speak, it is hard to see how we can acquire language in the first place. As J. Christopher Maloney has put it:

> To learn a language is to solve certain problems regarding what expressions mean and how they can combine with other symbols to form complex expressions. If this is what learning a language requires, then learning a language is a matter of thinking. Hence we must already be fluent in the mental language before we learn the languages which we speak. How else could we perform the mental computations necessary for learning the target language? [Maloney 1989, xxi-xxii; for a similar argument see Fodor 1975, 55-64].

Third, there is now a mass of experimental evidence, modifying older views associated with Piaget (1952), that infants totally lacking in language can use concepts to reason about the world. (For surveys, see Spelke 1994, Baillargeon 1995). For example, it has been shown that children as young as two-and-a-half months can mentally represent 'objects and surfaces that they no longer perceive' and that they can 'operate on their representations so as to derive information about an event they have never perceived'. (Spelke, Breinlinger, Macomber & Jacobsen 1992, 606). They can also perform elementary forms of addition and subtraction, keeping mental tallies of the number of objects which they see being hidden behind a screen or removed from behind it (Wynn 1992). Finally, very young infants can reason with concepts which relate to particular objects and classes of object, and can use more abstract notions of solidity, continuity, motion, cause and support. (Mandler 1988, 1992; Spelke, Breinlinger, Macomber & Jacobsen 1992; Baillargeon 1991). All this happens long before they have learned the phonetic symbols which represent the concepts which they use. Indeed, it is because infants acquire a rich store of pre-verbal concepts that they are later able to attach phonetic labels to them and acquire spoken language.

Fourth, even after we have acquired a language like Chinese or English, it is not the *medium in which we think.* Rather, we use that language to *express our thought.* There are several reasons for insisting on this distinction between thought and the language in which it is expressed:

(i) The languages which we speak are packed with words which correspond to more than one thought. As a result, we are forced to express quite unambiguous thoughts in ambiguous words, so that our audience sometimes mistakes our meaning. This mismatch between unambiguous thought and ambiguous language could not arise if we thought in the language which we speak. (Pinker 1994, 78-9).

(ii) We frequently use *different* terms to refer to the *same* person or thing. For example, I may mention 'the room in which I teach', then subsequently refer to it as 'the room' or as 'it'. The difference between the words (which are variable) and the concept (which is constant) is clear; and we think in terms of the unchanging *concept,* which is not tied to the variable *linguistic form.* (Pinker 1994, 80).

(iii) That thought is largely independent of any particular spoken language is shown by the fact that languages are satisfactorily, if imperfectly, translatable. As Jackendoff (1993, 185) says, 'the same thought can be expresssed in English, where the verb precedes the direct object, and in Japanese, where the verb follows the direct object; hence the form of the thought must be neutral as to word order.' Similarly, concepts are neutral as to the phonetic symbols used to represent them in different languages. Even when languages conceptualize the world in different ways, detailed explanation in one language can explain how the concepts in the other language differ, and translation of the concepts can be simplified by borrowing foreign words or coining new ones. None of this would be possible if our thought were tied to the phonology, the grammar and the semantic structures of a particular tongue.

(iv) People who speak only, say, English are aware that English dominates the conscious *expression* of their thought, and from this they often conclude that they *think* in English. People who are fluent

in more than one language, however, are less likely to jump to such a conclusion. If someone asks me whether I am thinking in English or Chinese, for example, I usually have to say that I simply don't know - or rather, that I am not conscious of thinking in either language. It is only when I am trying to *express* my thoughts - as when I am clarifying them, writing them down, or rehearsing what I am about to say - that they present themselves to my consciousness in either English or Chinese. When that happens, the language in which they appear is the language of my intended audience, not the original 'language of thought'.

If the 'language of thought' is not to be identified with any spoken language, what form does it take? In answering this question, we are handicapped by the fact that, as Jackendoff (1987, Part IV) has argued, the inner processes of thought are not open to introspective examination. We must infer the nature of our mental language from its results and from our rudimentary knowledge of brain processes. Philosophers and psychologists like Fodor (1975), Jackendoff (1987, 1992, 1993), Pinker (1989, 1994) and the contributors to Haugelund (1981) have used this approach, and their work suggests a number of conclusions:

1. Our mental language must be representational, with concept symbols associated with particular patterns of neural activity. (For a connectionist model of the relationship between representations and neural activity, see Hinton, McClelland & Rummelhart 1986).

2. In some ways, our mental language must be 'richer' than spoken languages, with two or more concept symbols corresponding to each word which has more than one meaning, and with a mechanism linking symbols which refer to the same thing (Pinker 1994, 81).

3. In other ways, the language of thought must be 'simpler' than spoken languages, requiring no information on pronunciation or word order, and having no concept symbols corresponding to words like *a, the, here* and *there* which are meaningless except in the context of particular conversations or texts (Pinker 1994, 82).

4. The mental language must have a 'conceptual grammar' linked to our neurology - a grammar which governs the syntactic and semantic relations of individual concepts, making it possible to combine them into complex thoughts. (Jackendoff 1993, 188-9; Sperber & Wilson 1995, 172-4; Anderson 1983).

5. The concept symbols must be capable of multiplication and modification in response to inputs from the spoken language and non-linguistic data supplied by the senses (cf. Jackendoff 1987, part III).

If 'inputs from the spoken language' can influence the language of thought, then some degree of linguistic engineering may still be possible. In order to judge its potential for success, we need to be more specific about the effects of the spoken language. At this point, we will confine our discussion to effects discussed in the literature on the language of thought. First, as Jackendoff (1987, 323) suggests, when the underlying concepts of our mental language are related to the syntactical and phonological structures of spoken language, they are 'thereby stabilized in memory (probably both short-term and long-term).' The greater the extent to which concepts are linked with structures, the easier they are to remember, partly because they are subjected to extra processing during the linking process and partly because the structures provide cues which aid the retrieval of concepts from memory (Eysenck & Keane 1995, 134-38; Anderson 1995, 220-29; Bower, Clark, Lesgold and Winzenz 1969). Spoken language therefore makes it possible for would-be linguistic engineers to stabilize politically useful concepts, just as it can stabilise concepts which suit those who do not want to be subjected to linguistic engineering. Spoken language, as such, is neutral. When it favours linguistic engineers, it is because they have acquired the power to enforce their chosen linguistic code.

Second, spoken language helps us to differentiate concepts more clearly. As Jackendoff (1987, 323) says, 'Two or more very similar concepts can be placed in registration with clearly distinct phonological structures and thereby be themselves kept distinct in memory and reasoning.' The contrasting phonology of the words *force*, *power* and *momentum*, for example, helps to differentiate the very similar concepts which these terms

symbolize, making it easier to remember and manipulate them (Jackendoff 1987, 323). Spoken language, therefore, is useful to would-be linguistic engineers who need to clarify the distinctions between closely matched concepts, just as it is useful to those whom they wish to control. As before, spoken language, in itself, is neutral. When it helps linguistic engineers, it is because they have the power to control it. When they lack that power, language can help clarify concepts used to attack them.

Third, language greatly enriches our conceptual structure. Not only does it give us access to other people's concepts, but by stabilizing our own concepts and attaching them to phonological structure it makes it easier to subject them to introspective examination. Moreover, with the help of writing, we can link concepts to visual cues which help us to recall them and keep them in mind. All of this facilitates the processes of reclassification, recombination and inference which lead to the development of higher-order concepts. The result, as Jackendoff (1987, 324) notes, is that it 'becomes possible to have concepts about concepts and, through language, to stabilize the resulting abstractions. In turn, phonological expression of such higher-order concepts can again be introspected, re-expressed, stabilized, and combined with other concepts.' The intellectual benefits of this are obvious, and it creates a problem for would-be linguistic engineers. They are less interested in the creative development of political theory than in using language to keep people under control. So for them, the way in which language facilitates analysis, criticism and new thought has disturbing implications. It gives people intellectual capabilities which make it very difficult to reduce them to automata programmed by political formulae. In this sense, language lies at the root of heresy.

1.2 Sapir, Whorf and the Categories of Thought

The role of language in stabilizing concepts, marking their differentiation and aiding analysis points to one form of the influence which language has on thought, and it is a type of influence which has implications for linguistic engineering. More far-reaching, however, are the claims about the influence of language associated with the linguists Edward Sapir and

Benjamin Lee Whorf. Neither quite proposed that we actually *think* in the language which we speak, but both were convinced that the semantic and grammatical categories of our language exercise a profound *influence* upon our way of thinking. In a famous statement, Sapir (1949, 162) suggested that our perception of reality varies according to the particular language which we speak:

> Human beings do not live in the objective world alone nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached.

Whorf (1956, 212-14) took up this theme and developed it even more explicitly:

> It was found that the background linguistic system (in other words, the grammar) of each language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself the shaper of ideas, the program and guide for the individual's mental activity, for his analysis of impressions, for his synthesis of his mental stock in trade. Formulation of ideas is not an independent process, strictly rational in the old sense, but is part of a particular grammar, and differs, from slightly to greatly, between grammars. We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds - and this means largely by the linguistic system in our minds. We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way - an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of or language. The agreement is, of course, an implicit and unstated one, BUT ITS TERMS ARE ABSOLUTELY OBLIGATORY; we cannot talk at all except by subscribing to the organization and classification of data which the agreement decrees. [Emphasis in original].

Whorf summarised this line of argument in his Principle of Linguistic Relativity (Whorf 1956, 221):

> the "linguistic relativity principle" ... means, in informal terms, that users of markedly different grammars are pointed by the grammars toward different types of observations and different evaluations of externally similar acts of observation, and hence are not equivalent as observers but must arrive at somewhat different views of the world.

In other words, the differences between languages cause non-linguistic differences in perception and cognition. Whether this amounts to a fully fledged theory of the linguistic determination of thought has been much debated (Schwanenflugel, Blount & Lin 1991; Kay & Kempton 1984, 65-6, 74-7; Lucy 1992b). In the passages above, for example, language is described as the 'shaper', 'program' and 'guide' of thought, so that people who speak different languages are 'pointed' towards different observations and evaluations and *'must* arrive at somewhat different views of the world.' [Emphasis added]. This sounds deterministic, but in the first passage Whorf also says that differences in conceptual categories are only 'largely' determined by language. This implies that our concepts may sometimes be influenced at least in part by non-linguistic factors, such as inputs from the environment. And indeed, when discussing concepts of space, Whorf explicitly endorsed this view:

> There is no such striking difference between Hopi and SAE [Standard Average European] about space as about time, and *probably the apprehension of space is given in substantially the same form by experience irrespective of language.* The experiments of the Gestalt psychologists with visual perception appear to establish this as a fact. [Whorf 1956, 158-9, emphasis added; see Foley 1997, ch. 11, for discussion].

Whorf regarded concepts of space as exceptions to the Principle of Linguistic Relativity. He also believed that our numerical categories could represent the realities of nature when applied to 'real plurals' in the form of 'perceptible spatial aggregates', as when we count 'ten men' and so on. It is only when we apply numerical terminology to 'imaginary plurals' or 'metaphorical aggregates' - as when we carve up time into units which cannot be 'objectively experienced' - that we impose linguistic categories on the 'kaleidoscopic flux of impressions' which constitutes our raw sensory

experience (Whorf 1956, 139; Lucy 1992b, 50-62; Foley 1997). So Whorf clearly exempted some of our categories from his generalizations about how languages 'shape', 'program' and 'guide' thought. It is not clear, though, how many exemptions he was prepared to make, and how far he was prepared to push his more deterministic formulations in relation to categories which he did not exempt.

Whether Whorf was in some sense a linguistic determinist is an exegetical question which we do not need to resolve here. What matters is whether the doctrine of linguistic determinism is correct, for if it is, we will have to confront the Orwellian nightmare that Big Brother could reduce us to linguistically programmed robots. There are, in fact, compelling reasons to reject deterministic claims. In particular, linguistic determinism makes it impossible to explain how we are able to 'structure' experience and relate words to concepts so that we can acquire our first language; it is refuted by the fact that people who speak the same language can use that language to express radically different concepts linked to different world views; and it is impossible to reconcile with the fact that groups which speak different languages can use those languages to express the same world view (Bright & Bright 1965); and it leaves us with no explanation for the undoubted fact that we can take concepts developed in one language and translate them into another language. Indeed, if linguistic determinism were true, Whorf could never have explained his views. He would never have been able to use the English language to explain concepts of time allegedly linked inextricably to the Hopi language (Whorf 1956, 55, 57, 64, 140, 146, 153, 216-17). And although he argued that the word 'empty' led people to the mistaken belief that empty gasoline drums contained nothing dangerous (Whorf 1956, 135), the word still did not stop him and many others from understanding that such drums contain highly explosive vapour.

If the strong, deterministic version of the Whorf hypothesis can easily be dismissed, there is a weak version which is consistent with Whorf's ability to explain Hopi concepts in English and to avoid being misled by the word 'empty'. David Carroll (1994, 378) expresses that version as follows:

> [A] weak version of the hypothesis states that the presence of linguistic categories influences the ease with which various cognitive operations are performed. That is, certain thought processes may be

> more accessible or more easily performed by members of one linguistic community relative to those of a different linguistic community. As Hockett (1954) expresses it, "languages differ not so much as to what can be said in them, but rather as to what it is relatively easy to say" (p. 122).

This form of the hypothesis has been treated seriously by linguists and has generated important research. Some of that research has revealed the existence of linguistic universals such as the fact that all languages name the same basic shapes and spatial relations (Clark & Clark 1977), or the fact that there is a fixed hierarchy in the addition of terms for colours (Berlin & Kay 1969). Moreover, research has confirmed that people can distinguish and remember perceptual inputs even when their language has no words with which to describe them (Heider 1972; Heider & Oliver 1973; Rosch 1973). This, however, does not rule out the possibility that the structure of some languages facilitates perceptions and thought processes which the structure of other languages makes difficult. In fact, there is accumulating evidence that this is the case.

Several studies have shown that under some circumstances *semantic categories* influence cognition. For example, Kay and Kempton (1984) have demonstrated that English speakers (who have separate terms for the colours green and blue) replicate the dichotomy in their language by exaggerating the distances between colours close to the green/blue boundary. By contrast, Tarahumara speakers (who do not have separate words for the colours) are not influenced by linguistically based dichotomies and show no tendency towards exaggeration.

Other studies have investigated the relationship between different ways of naming numbers and children's understanding of elementary mathematical concepts. In Chinese, Japanese and Korean, the names of numbers explicitly follow a base-10 numerical system. For example, in Chinese the number eleven is called *shi-yi* ('ten-one'), twelve is *shi-er* ('ten-two'), twenty is *er-shi* ('two-tens') and forty is *si-shi* ('four-tens'). In English, numerical names are not related to the base-10 system nearly as clearly, so using them does little to facilitate base-10 reasoning. It is not surprising, therefore, that young East Asian children are much more likely to use the base system than their American counterparts. Miura, Kim, Chang &

Okamoto (1988) gave coloured unit blocks and differently coloured tens blocks to socio-economically matched Japanese, Chinese, Korean and American first-graders, then told them to use the blocks to build five different numbers. The fastest solution was always to use the base-10 system to the maximum, while the slowest was always to build the number entirely from unit blocks. The quickest way to build the number 42, for example, was to use four tens blocks and two unit blocks, while the slowest way was to count out 42 unit blocks. When tested, 72 percent of Japanese, 81 percent of Chinese and 83 percent of Korean children used the tens blocks to the maximum on their first try at each number, achieving the fastest solution; by contrast, only 8 percent of the American children did this, the remainder almost invariably counting out the required number of unit blocks. When reminded that ten unit blocks were equivalent to one tens block then told to find another way of building the numbers, only 13 percent of the American youngsters succeeded in finding two correct ways of showing all five numbers: the counting out of unit blocks was the only method which most could use effectively. By contrast 98 percent of the Koreans, 79 percent of the Japanese and 76 percent of the Chinese found two correct representations of all numbers. The American first-graders were even far outscored by a sample of children from a Korean kindergarten. (American children of kindergarten age could not be tested because pilot work indicated that they could not count well enough. Miura and her colleagues very plausibly relate this to the fact that English speakers have to learn more words to represent numbers than do speakers of East Asian languages. The latter simply learn the words for numbers one to ten, then can extrapolate the rest using a simple set of rules that reflect the written numerals). Other studies by Miura and her colleagues on matched samples of Japanese and American first-graders have obtained similar results (Miura 1987; Miura & Okamoto 1989).

Non-linguistic variables common to the Japanese, Chinese and Korean cultures, of course, may help explain why East Asian children are so quick to develop a facility in base-ten reasoning. It is certainly true that their attitudes towards mathematical and educational achievement are different from Western ones, with both parents and children setting higher standards and emphasising hard work rather than natural ability (cf. Stevenson, Chen & Lee 1993; Chen & Stevenson 1995). However, it is by no means clear that

these attitudes are sufficient to account for the East Asian children's superiority in base-ten reasoning at the *outset* of their school careers, or to account for the fact that Korean kindergarten children far outscore American first-graders. It seems very plausible to suggest that Asian children's performance was helped by the fact that they had been introduced to the base-10 system as they learned to count in their native languages. It is also tempting to suggest that the East Asian languages promote an approach to numerical reasoning which enhances subsequent mathematical performance - especially since 'bilingual Asian-American students tend to score higher in math achievement than do those who speak only English' (Wade &Tavris 1993, 303, citing Moore & Stanley 1986). The striking superiority of East Asian students in international tests of mathematical performance may be less mysterious than it seems.

Whorf was particularly interested in the effects of different *grammatical structures* on cognition, and a study by Bloom (1981) produced results which seemed to provide dramatic support for his intuitions. Bloom pointed out that English uses the subjunctive mood to express counterfactual conditionals - hypothetical statements positing states of affairs which never existed ('If Mao had died in 1964, the Cultural Revolution would never have occurred'). This grammatical construction indicates that Mao did *not* die in 1964 and that the Cultural Revolution *did* occur. There is, however, no equivalent construction in Chinese, so that hearers and readers must supplement the grammar with contextual clues before they can infer that the state of affairs is hypothetical. Since this involves a more complex form of reasoning, Bloom predicted that Chinese speakers would find counterfactual thinking more difficult than English speakers do. To test this hypothesis, he conducted several studies. The results indicated that Chinese students were far less likely than American ones to interpret stories counterfactually, even when a counterfactual interpretation was the only one which made sense. This seemed to vindicate his hypothesis that Chinese speakers have difficulty in reasoning counterfactually.

Bloom's conclusions, however, have been questioned by studies conducted by Au (1983, 1984) and Liu (1985). They alleged that the stories given to Bloom's Chinese subjects were ambiguous and not idiomatic. Au

(1983) revised Bloom's materials and found that the performance of Chinese students greatly improved, but Bloom (1984) replied that Au had simplified the materials and had tested students whose thought patterns had been affected by studying English for twelve years. In order to assess Bloom's response, Liu (1985) used abstract and complex materials to test Chinese students who had little or no exposure to English. She found that the students' ability to reason counterfactually increased markedly with age, and that the older students performed well. However, since she made no attempt to test English speaking students on translations of the Chinese material, her study tells us nothing about the comparative performance of the two groups. The controversy remains unsettled. As Carroll (1994, 386) comments, 'It would appear that a direct comparison of Chinese and English monolinguals on a reasonably complex, yet idiomatic, set of materials would be in order.'

Stronger evidence for the influence of grammatical structures on thought comes from a comparison of Navaho and English by Carroll and Casagrande (1958). In Navaho, but not in English, verbs describing the handling of objects vary according to the objects' form (long and rigid, flat and flexible, and so on). Carroll and Casagrande hypothesised that Navaho children who spoke Navaho would pay greater attention to form than Navaho children who spoke English, and that they would therefore begin to group objects by form rather than colour at an earlier age. In other words, they expected the Navaho speakers to develop more quickly the adult tendency to see greater essential similarity between a yellow rope and a blue rope than between a yellow rope and a yellow stick. When they tested the children, their prediction was fully confirmed. Since the two language groups came from the same reservation and lived under similar conditions, the influence of language on thought is probably confirmed. However, Carroll and Casagrande also discovered that white, English speaking children in a Boston suburb paid attention to form as early as the Navaho children on the reservation. This probably just indicates that language is not the only factor which affects cognitive development: the toys and puzzles of a suburban childhood can be as effective as the Navaho language in fostering attention to form.

Finally, Lucy (1992a) has researched the cognitive implications of the very different ways in which English and Yucatec Maya grammatically mark number. In English, plural forms are used for all discrete objects, whether animate or inanimate, but not for objects without definite boundaries. In other words, English speakers mark the plural for count nouns ('women', 'chairs'), but not for mass nouns (we do not say 'flours' or 'milks'). Yucatec speakers, by contrast, disregard the count noun/mass noun division, substituting the animate/inanimate one. They use the plural only for animate objects, and even then it is optional. So grammatical number is far more important in English than in Yucatec. Lucy proposed that this would lead English speakers to be more attentive than Yucatec speakers to how many objects they were observing, especially in the case of objects which were both inanimate and discrete. To test this hypothesis, he showed English speaking Americans and Yucatec speaking Mayans line drawings of scenes from Yucatec life - scenes which always included various numbers of a range of objects (two people, three hens, and so on). He then asked his test subjects to describe verbally what they had seen. As expected, the English speakers were significantly more likely to say how many objects of various sorts were in the pictures. This tendency was especially strong in the case of discrete, inanimate objects, where English always marks the plural and Yucatec never does. This, of course, was entirely predictable on 'weak Whorfian' principles.

Lucy also noted that in Yucatec all nouns are semantically very like mass nouns in English: they refer less to the form of their referents than to their material or substance. For that reason, Yucatec nouns require numerical classifiers to provide information about the *form* of their referents, putting boundaries around their substance. This is the English use of classifiers to give form to the boundless substance of mass nouns ('three *bags* of sugar', 'a *loaf* of bread'). It contrasts with the treatment of English count nouns (the vast majority), which require no classifiers because semantically they delineate the form of their referents. Lucy predicted that these linguistic differences between Yucatec and English would be reflected in cognitive differences: Yucatec speakers, with their linguistically directed focus on material or substance, would classify as similar objects which were made of the same substance but had radically different forms; and English speakers, with their linguistically directed focus on form, would classify as

similar objects which were made of radically different material but shared the same form. He tested this hypothesis by showing speakers of both languages a cardboard box, then asking them whether it was more like a plastic box of similar shape or a small piece of cardboard. The English speakers, as predicted, saw the two boxes as more alike, whereas the Yucatec speakers saw greater similarity between the cardboard box and the piece of cardboard. So judgments of similarity reflected the contrasting patterns of the languages. Again, a 'weak Whorfian' approach had been vindicated.

Whorf's reputation amongst linguists is mixed. It has suffered because his name has been linked (rightly or wrongly) to indefensible doctrines of linguistic determinism, and because the quality of his fieldwork has been questioned. In particular, he seems to have misunderstood the Hopi concept of time, grossly exaggerating the extent to which it differs from Western views (Malotki 1983). He also contributed to what has been called 'the great Eskimo vocabulary hoax': the snow-balling estimates of the number of Eskimo words for snow - estimates which are the standard and inaccurate illustration of the way in which different languages 'impose' different systems of classification on reality (Martin 1986; Pullum 1991). However, none of this should be allowed to obscure the fact that there is mounting evidence in favour of a 'weak', non-deterministic version of Whorf's hypothesis: that the language which we speak *influences* our thought, making it easier for us to entertain some thoughts and harder for us to entertain others.

The implications of this for linguistic engineering are clear. We need not fear an Orwellian world in which language is used as a technology for programming our thought, reducing us to ciphers of Newspeak. However, changing the language which we read, write, speak and hear can *sometimes* change the way in which we think. The grammatical structures which Whorf thought so important, however, are not the aspect of language most likely to be manipulated by linguistic engineers. Feminists might have made the world safer for feminism by popularizing singular 'they' as a substitute for sexist 'he' when referring to a generic person (cf. Hyde 1984; Henley 1989), but this is a rare example of a politically motivated grammatical change. In part, the rarity of grammatical manipulation stems from the fact that most would-be linguistic engineers have only tacit

knowledge of grammar, so that it is often difficult for them to analyse its potential effects on thought. It also reflects the fact that extensive grammatical change would be enormously unpopular and disruptive. (This is one reason amongst many why the General Semantics movement is unlikely to succeed in its assault on the verb 'to be'). So most efforts at linguistic engineering are more likely to involve reform of *semantic* categories, whose political and moral implications are easy to detect, whose manipulation is less disruptive, and which are widely known to change anyway. We shall see that this was very much the case in Mao's China, where new words were added to the lexicon, old words were given new meanings, but grammatical structures were largely untouched. The case of China also reveals that linguistic engineering can involve far more than tampering with semantic categories or grammar. It can involve the manipulation of established linguistic forms as well. The mechanisms through which such manipulation can sway our minds are discussed in the next two sections.

1.3 Concepts, Schemas and World View

Research by cognitive and behavioural psychologists demonstrates that linguistic engineering can influence our thought in ways almost entirely ignored in the debate over Whorf - a debate which has focused on the effects of semantic categories and grammatical structures. In this section, I will discuss the implications for linguistic engineering of *schema theory*, which was introduced to modern psychology by Sir Frederic Bartlett (1932). Schema theory was also taken up by Piaget (1967, 1970) as a way of conceptualizing changes in children's cognition, but it was not until the 1970s that it became what Eysenck & Keane (1995, 262) have called 'a dominant interest' in cognitive psychology. It has remained popular, along with the very similar bodies of theory attached to the closely related concepts of 'frames' (Minsky 1975) and 'scripts' (Schank & Abelson 1977). As we shall see, schema theory gives us a framework for understanding how language can be manipulated to affect our concepts and schemas, and though them our beliefs and attitudes.

First, we need to clarify the crucial terms 'concept' and 'schema'. A concept, we have seen, is a mental representation grounded in a particular pattern of neural firing in our brains. It can exist independently of any phonetic forms used to express it in spoken languages. But what is a schema? Cognitive psychologists have defined the term in a variety of ways, but the most useful definition for our purposes is that it is *an interconnected and hierarchically organised complex of beliefs about any person or thing.* At its apex, there is a central concept, while its base consists of the attributes associated with that concept. It can be represented diagrammatically as in Figure 1.1, where A1...A4 are some of the attributes linked to the concept in encyclopaedic memory.

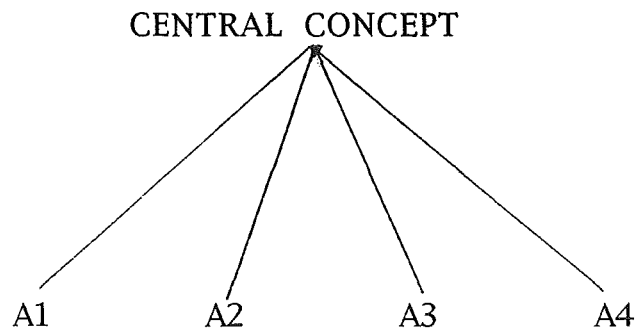

FIG. 1.1. Representation of a Schema.
(Adapted from Fiske 1986, 45)

The central concept can refer to an individual person (oneself, say, or Chairman Mao), to a group of people (Red Guards or capitalist roaders), to a place (the United States), to an event (the Long March) or to anything at all (animal, vegetable or mineral). The attributes of the concept can include any of its supposed instantiations and any properties thought to be linked to it by causal, semantic or other relations. A Chinese Marxist's schema for 'revolution', for example, might include the following amongst its attributes:

A1: It is caused by class struggle.

A2: It is always opposed by imperialists.

A3: It is usually violent.

A4: It is instantiated by the Russian Revolution, China's Republican Revolution in 1911, China's Liberation in 1949, etc.

Both the central concept and its attributes are sometimes associated with an evaluative response. Our hypothetical Chinese Marxist, for example, might give a positive evaluation to the central concept of 'revolution', to the pleasingly materialist causal explanation in A1, to the justified violence in A3, and to the welcome instantiations of the central concept in A4. Her response to the imperialist opposition referred to in A2 will no doubt be negative. We can incorporate this evaluative response into a diagrammatic representation of our Marxist's schema by adding positive or negative evaluative tags in the form of + or - signs as in Figure 1.2.

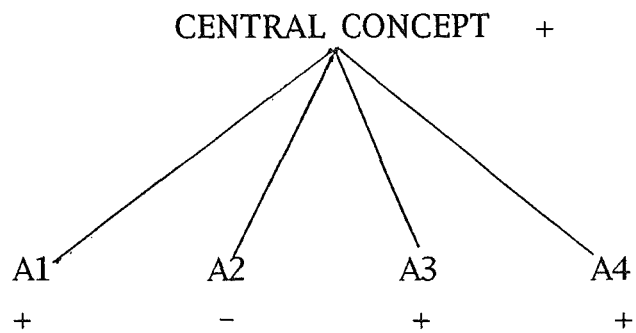

FIG. 1.2. Representation of evaluative responses within the structure of our hypothetical Marxist's schema for revolution. (Adapted from Fiske 1986, 46).

The central concept in one schema can, without contradiction, play a subordinate role as part of an attribute in another schema. For example, a schema for 'imperialists' might feature their opposition to revolution as one of their attributes. In that case, 'imperialists' will be the central concept at the top of this schematic pyramid and 'revolution' will be a subordinate

concept playing its part among the attributes which constitute the base. It matters not at all that in another schematic pyramid the hierarchy is reversed.

Schemas are linked together in wider associative networks. For example, the schema for 'revolution' is linked by attribute A1 with schemas for 'class struggle', 'contradiction', 'forces of production' and 'relations of production'; by attribute A2 with schemas for 'opposition' and 'imperialists'; by attribute A3 with a schema for 'violence'; and by attribute A4 with schemas for the Russian, Chinese and other revolutions. These schemas are in turn linked by their attributes with still other schemas. So when our Marxist hears the word 'revolution', this not only activates her schema for the concept 'revolution' but through a process of *associative priming* it puts related schemas on call. This facilitates access to their contents through a process of *spreading activation* along well established neural pathways. So people who have been primed by hearing the word 'revolution' are better and faster than other people at recognizing and remembering words, concepts and assumptions linked to the concept of revolution through an associative network. Similarly, they are better at recognizing and remembering words, concepts and assumptions linked to such a priming stimulus than at remembering those which are not linked. (Research demonstrating these phenomena is discussed by Anderson 1983, 86-125, 171-214; and Anderson 1995, 150-54, 180-86, 220-29. For a defence of spreading activation against rival explanations of associative priming, see McNamara 1992).

Schemas and associative networks facilitate the storage of assumptions in memory. Material which is fitted into schemas and associative networks is much easier to remember than material for which we have no meaningful associations (Anderson 1995, 220-29). For example, Bower, Clark, Lesgold and Winzenz (1969) asked subjects to learn 112 words which had been grouped in schemas linked together meaningfully in four associative networks. They then compared their performance with that of a control group of subjects who were presented with the same words classified at random. At the first trial, after four minutes' learning, subjects who had been presented with the schematically organised material remembered an average of 73 words while those who had been presented with disorganized

lists remembered only 20.6 words. By the third trial, subjects who encountered the material in schemas and associative clusters all had perfect recall, whereas the control group still averaged only 52.8 words.

Persuaders who can control our language are in a position to alter our concepts and schemas, thereby activating mechanisms which can transform our world view. They can do this through a technique of linguistic engineering which has been used in all the twentieth century totalitarian societies, but in none as systematically as in China. All they need to do is make people repeatedly read, hear and speak language which is linked to concepts and schemas embedded in the persuader's world view, while at the same time forbidding people to use language which is linked to concepts and schemas embedded in the old world view. Under these circumstances, constant activation will make the persuader's concepts and schemas steadily more accessible, while our old concepts and schemas will gradually become less accessible through lack of activation and through the 'interference effect' which new learning has on old learning (Anderson 1995, 186-7, 200-03, 211-13). And, once we begin to use the persuader's concepts and schemas, we begin to see the world differently. Three mechanisms underlie this change in world view:

1. By creating expectations about the world, concepts and schemas lead us to explore our environment (including our linguistic environment) in particular ways. As a result, we pay attention to things which people equipped with different concepts and schemas would sometimes miss. We also use schemas to fill in gaps in our perceptions, and to supply interpretive assumptions crucial to the interpretation of discourse. So concepts and schemas influence our perception of our environment, introducing an element of 'top-down processing' into the way in which we encounter it (Neisser 1976; Bower, Black & Turner 1979; Eysenck & Keane 1995, 73-94, 320-23; Anderson 1995, 61-72, 211-19).

2. We are far more likely to store and recall information which we organize schematically (Bower, Clark, Lesgold and Winzenz 1969; Anderson 1995, 220-24), and people with different schemas tend to remember different things. Moreover, much of what we think we

'remember' is not retrieved directly from memory, but inferred from assumptions and stereotypes associated with our schemas. (Anderson 1995, 211-19; Bower, Black & Turner 1979). So by influencing what we store in memory and what we recall or inferentially reconstruct from memory, schemas tend to 'skew' our developing versions of reality.

3. Concepts and schemas affect the ways in which we categorize sensory inputs which come to our attention, and this process of categorization imputes 'meaning' to the inputs and links them to wider interpretations. This can be perfectly compatible with objectivity, as when a radiologist's schematic knowledge enables her to see that shadows on X-ray pictures, which to me are merely shadows, are indications of tuberculosis. But concepts and schemas can sometimes commit us to particular evaluative frameworks - as when the Kuomintang's expulsion from the Chinese mainland in 1949 is categorized, according to the value-tagged concepts and schemas of different speakers, as either China's 'Liberation' or as the Nationalists' 'strategic withdrawal' to Taiwan.

In calling attention to these ways in which concepts and schemas influence our versions of reality, I am of course not implying that we are locked within them, seeing only what they lead us to expect. Nor am I implying that their influence is irrational. Rather, I am calling attention to what Ulrich Neisser (1976) has called the 'cycle of perception', in which our existing concepts and schemas direct our exploration of the environment and in which the environment in turn confirms some of our predictions but contradicts others - leading us, perhaps, to modify or replace some of our concepts and schemas. Figure 1.4 outlines this dialectic between concepts and schemas on the one hand and information available from the environment on the other.

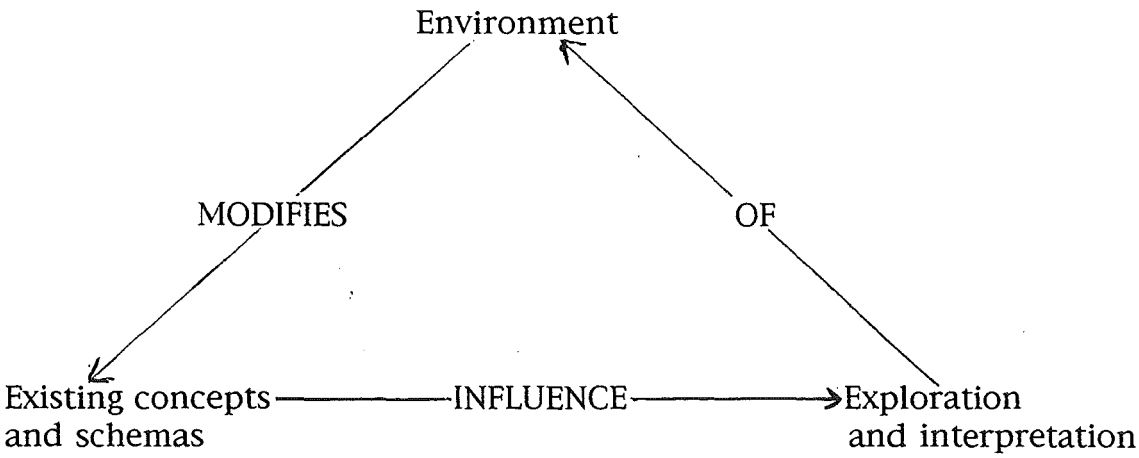

FIG. 1.3. The cycle of perception.
(Adapted from Neisser 1976, and Galotti 1994)

Within this cycle, we neglect neither the influence of 'top-down processing' from our existing concepts and schemas nor the impact of 'bottom up information' from the environment - whose importance has been amply demonstrated by researchers like Gibson (1966, 1979). Moreover, within the cycle, our concepts and schemas do not cancel our rationality but direct and empower it. They classify and integrate information gained from past exploration of the environment, and they do so in ways relevant to our purposes; they facilitate the storage and retrieval of that information; and they help to ensure that future exploration is not random, but proceeds in directions which our experience shows are most likely to be profitable. They thus introduce a 'bias' into our processing of information, but it is, on balance, a healthy bias. It may cause us to overlook or misinterpret some information which is relevant to our concerns, but without it we would be far more likely to look in the wrong places and would lack a tool vital to rational interpretation. Even concepts and schemas fed to us by the most cynical of propagandists will almost certainly be more useful to us in encountering the world than would the blank incomprehension of a mind with no concepts and schemas at all. So concepts and schemas contribute powerfully to our rationality, even as they channel it in specific directions. And a persuader who, through controlling our language, makes us more likely to use one set of concepts and schemas rather than another, does not override our rationality but simply points it in new directions.

Linguistic engineering, then, can alter the outcome of rational information processing by affecting the conceptual and schematic apparatus through which we interpret our experience. In doing this, it would not reduce us to automata, and it would not be wholly effective. Concepts and schemas emphasised by linguistic engineers could still be rejected and modified because they made no sense of 'bottom up' inputs from our environment, and they could still be subjected to silent rational critique by people concerned about their consistency and implications. In other words, while schema theory does not justify fears that our thoughts could be linguistically *programmed* as in Orwell's fictional Oceania, it gives us every reason to believe that linguistic engineering could *influence* them through mechanisms closely linked to our rationality.

1.4 Primitive Affective and Associational Processes

Language can also be used to activate mechanisms of persuasion which have nothing to do with rationality - what Petty and Cacioppo (1986, 9) call 'rather primitive affective and associational processes'. Eight such processes will be referred to repeatedly in later chapters and require explanation here. Two of these processes involve nothing more than the repetition of words and propositions (mere exposure and repetition leading to the validity effect); two involve conditioning (higher order conditioning and operant conditioning); two involve the crucial role of language in imitative behaviour and group membership (modelling theory and reference group theory); and two of them involve the manipulation of discrepancies between people's verbal behaviour and their attitudes (the theory of cognitive dissonance and self-perception theory). Let us take them in order.

Mere Exposure

According to the theory of mere exposure, the more people are exposed to something, the more favourably they evaluate it. In a classic experiment, Zajonc (1968) showed that the more frequently students were asked to pronounce nonsense words, the more they liked them. Similar results have

been obtained in experiments exposing students to stimuli as diverse as Chinese characters, Pakistani music, Turkish words, irregular polygons and graduation pictures (Harrison 1977; Bornstein 1989; Perloff 1993, 58-9). The effect seems to be particularly strong when the target of the exposure is relatively complex, when it appears in a variety of contexts, and when each exposure is brief. Excessive repetition can lead to 'wear out', but most people still like the target better than they did at the first exposure (Bornstein 1989; Perloff 1993, 59-61).

The effects of mere exposure are manipulated by advertisers to secure brand acceptance. They also have important implications for linguistic engineering. They indicate that if people are repeatedly exposed to the name of a political leader or of a real or fictitious model of political virtue, they will view that name more favourably. They will probably also be more inclined to look kindly upon the person to whom the name refers. Mere exposure can also make people accept and eventually *like* a new political vocabulary which they are made to hear, read and use regularly.

The Validity Effect

When we hear or read a statement two, three or more times, we experience what is known as the validity effect: we are more inclined to think that the statement is true than we were the first time we heard or read it. The effect occurs irrespective of whether the statement is true or false, and it extends to statements which are *related* to the statement which we originally encountered. It is not dependent on any attempt at persuasion: repetition of the statement is enough. (See Hasher, Goldstein & Toppino 1977; Schwartz 1982; Arkes, Hackett & Boehm 1989; Arkes, Boehm & Xu 1991; Boehm 1994).

While the validity effect bears a resemblance to the phenomenon of mere exposure, it is not the same thing. It involves increased belief that a statement is *true*, not a greater *liking* for the statement; it requires only a couple of repetitions to achieve its maximum effectiveness, whereas mere exposure requires many more; and it seems to depend on a different causal mechanism (Arkes, Boehm & Xu 1991). However, like mere exposure, it has

important implications for linguistic engineering. Quite simply, it means that if we make people read or listen to politically correct statements, we increase the likelihood that they will accept them as true even if we offer no argument in their support.

Higher Order Conditioning

The study of higher order conditioning grew out of the discovery of classical conditioning by the great Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov and out of subsequent research by behaviourist psychologists like J.B. Watson (e.g. Watson 1925). Pavlov showed that if you regularly pair a neutral stimulus (say, a sound) with an unconditioned stimulus (e.g. a slap) which produces an unconditioned reflex response (pain), then the neutral stimulus (the sound) soon acquires the power to produce the response (pain). In other words, the neutral stimulus has been transformed into a conditioned stimulus which produces a conditioned response.

The related phenomenon of higher order conditioning occurs when something elicits an emotional response through repeated association with words or things which have already been conditioned to elicit that response. This form of conditioning is one of the most important items in the toolbox of the linguistic engineer. It allows us to influence people's attitudes towards, say, a political cause by making people use words which systematically link that cause with the desired evaluative response, whether it be positive or negative.

The effectiveness of higher order conditioning was experimentally demonstrated in two studies by Staats and Staats (1957, 1958). In the first study, the two researchers repeatedly paired one group of nonsense syllables with positive words like 'happy', then paired another group of syllables with negative words like 'sad'. They found that when people were exposed to the paired syllables, they gave a positive evaluation to the nonsense syllables paired with positive words and a negative evaluation to the nonsense syllables associated with negative words.

In the second study, Staats and Staats (1958) demonstrated that higher order conditioning could be used to affect attitudes towards the names of ethnic groups. For one group of subjects, they paired the word 'Dutch' with positive words but paired the word 'Swedish' with negative ones. For a second group of subjects, they reversed the pairing, connecting 'Dutch' with negative words and 'Swedish' with positive ones. They then tested attitudes towards the two nationality names and found that the group which had heard positive words in conjunction with 'Dutch' rated that term more favourably than 'Swedish', whereas for the group which had heard positive words in connection with the word 'Swedish' the ratings were reversed. It seems fair to suggest that the evaluative responses transferred to the words 'Dutch' and 'Swedish' were also transferred to the nationalities which were those words' referents.

Higher order conditioning is a potent tool of attitude change. A persuader who ensures that the word 'capitalism', for example, appears regularly in conjuction with words like 'exploitation' will have a good chance of establishing a negative emotional response to capitalism. This response can be obtained purely through manipulating the juxtaposition of words: it does not require that those words be linked syntactically so that the hearer can acquire an affective tag through understanding the *propositional content* of a sentence like 'Capitalism is based on exploitation.'

The persuasive effects of higher order conditioning are complemented by the process of *semantic generalization,* through which affective tags acquired though conditioning spread to related words and concepts. People who have acquired a negative emotional response to the word "capitalist", for example, will generalize that response to semantically related words like 'profit' and 'stockmarket'. (Cf. Bem 1970, 43-5; Wade & Travis 1993, 204-5; Perloff 1993, 63-9). Such forms of verbal conditioning are a major source of our attitudes towards people and things. They are a fundamental tool of advertising and of political propaganda. They are also part of the stock-in -trade of the linguistic engineer. Their main limitation is that they work best when people do not know much about the subject (Cacioppo, Marshall-Goodell, Tassinary & Petty 1992).

Operant Conditioning

Most people have not needed modern behavioural science to tell them that there is merit in what psychologists call operant conditioning - modifying people's attitudes through reward and punishment. However, the research of B.F. Skinner (1938) and his successors has greatly increased our understanding of the way in which operant conditioning works and affects our attitudes.

The relevance of operant conditioning to linguistic engineering has been demonstrated by studies which show that we can alter the attitudes of speakers and writers by making people praise or condemn them. For example, Scott (1957) got pairs of students to participate in a debate, then rigged the outcome, telling some that they had 'won' and others that they had 'lost'. Normally, getting people to argue a case tends to make them regard it more favourably (Cf. Perloff 1993, 109-10, 230-33). However, in this case only the students who were rewarded ('reinforced') by being told that they had won changed their attitudes significantly in the direction of the case which they had argued. The students who were punished by being told that they had 'lost' showed little attitude change.

In a similar study, Bostrom, Vlandis and Rosenbaum (1961) got students to write essays in which they advocated views which they had hitherto disagreed with, then gave some of the essays 'As' and the others 'Ds'. The students rewarded with the 'As' shifted their attitudes towards the case which they had advocated significantly more than the students punished with the 'Ds'. Finally, Insko (1965) showed that when interviewers responded positively to answers favouring one side of a controversy but not to statements favouring the other side, the subjects shifted their attitudes in the direction of the statements which had been reinforced by a positive response.

Operant conditioning is a powerful tool in the hands of linguistic engineers who are in a position to direct patterns of verbal reinforcement and punishment. All they need to do is get people to make statements which express 'correct' attitudes, then ensure that these statements are greeted with approval. Even people who do not initially agree with the

statements which they are pushed into making will feel the effects of the positive reinforcement: their attitudes will tend to shift in the direction of their statements, just like the attitudes of the students rewarded by 'As' in the experimental situation devised by Bostrom, Vlandis and Rosenbaum. At the same time, wise linguistic engineers will ensure that all statements expressing 'incorrect' views are punished by verbal disapproval: dissidents will not only be discouraged from expressing their views, but will tend to lose confidence in them as well.

Modelling Theory

Research generated by modelling theory has vindicated and elaborated the age-old view that we can learn by example. Albert Bandura and his colleagues, especially, have shown that we can learn attitudes in the absence of direct reinforcement, simply by observing or listening to others. (See, for example, Bandura, Ross & Ross 1965; Bandura, Grusec & Menlove 1966; Bandura 1971; Bandura 1973). Young people, especially, tend to adopt the attitudes modelled by the speech and behaviour of those who impress them. This has important implications for linguistic engineering. It means that if we have the power to control people's verbal behaviour, we can create a situation in which *everyone* models correct attitudes. It matters not at all that some people are secret heretics, for they are forced to model the very attitudes which they inwardly oppose.

Bandura argued that successful modelling is most likely to occur when models capture our attention, when we mentally rehearse then act out the modelled behaviour, and when we see that it is rewarded. Linguistic engineers who are powerful enough to control what people say are powerful enough to ensure that these conditions of successful modelling are fulfilled. They can ensure that the verbal modelling of correct attitudes is so all-pervasive that it is repeatedly brought to people's attention; they can use the state propaganda apparatus to create leading models in a heroic mould, so that young people, especially, want to adopt their attitudes; they can make even young children learn and repeat the words uttered by the leading models; and they can ensure that people who express correct attitudes, whether in propaganda material or in real life, are praised and

perhaps given other rewards, so that those who observe them learn through vicarious operant conditioning.

In Western societies, attempts to use role models to control young people's attitudes are frequently frustrated by a multiplicity of rival models glamourizing alternative values. Parents, schools, peer groups, churches, rock stars, sports personalities and the media frequently offer conflicting models of acceptable attitudes and behaviour. However, as Perloff (1993, 73) notes, 'When all the socialization agents (parents, peers, schools, media, etc.) convey the same message, then the situation is rather simple: the child will probably internalize the position advocated by the different influence sources.' This unanimity can usually be achieved only when parents are lucky in their children's choice of friends and when they manage to shield their children from 'undesirable' films and television.

In totalitarian societies, it is different. There, the rulers can destroy alternative models within the country, and they can censor reports about opposing models based overseas. Moreover, by making people act and speak in prescribed ways, they can force virtually the entire society to model the desired attitudes. In such societies, the centralised control of verbal modelling is one of the most powerful tools of linguistic engineering. It does not always succeed, as we shall see below, but it can make heretics feel totally isolated, and it can profoundly affect the attitudes of the younger generation.

Reference Group Theory

Reference group theory is closely related to modelling theory, but it has a

different focus. Modelling theory in its classical form emphasises the way in people tend to adopt the attitudes of *individuals who impress them.* It gives us important insights into the socialization of young people, but is less useful in explaining the attitudes of adults, who are less inclined to hero worship. Reference group theory, by contrast, directs attention to the way in which people tend to adopt the attitudes of *groups whose acceptance they want* - groups to which they *refer* when deciding what to think. Since people of all ages feel the need to be accepted, reference group theory is equally valuable in explaining the attitudes of young and old.

The influence of reference groups has been demonstrated in a number of studies. Kelley and Woodruff (1956), for example, asked students at a progressive teachers college to listen to a recording of a speech delivering an conservative, 'back-to-basics' message on education. The speech contradicted the views of most of the students, but the recording made it clear that it was warmly received by the original audience, whose members repeatedly interrupted it with applause. Half the students had been told ht the audience consisted of their fellow students, while the other half had been led to believe that the audience was made up of local townspeople - a group with which the students did not identify. The results showed that the students who believed that their own reference group had endorsed the speech were far more likely to waver in their support for progressive education than were the students who believed that the applause came from 'outsiders'. In other words, most students were prepared to modify their opinions to fit in with their reference group, but they largely ignored the views of people with whom they did not identify and whose acceptance they did not need.

In a classic study, Newcomb (1943) explored reference group behaviour at Bennington college. Two-thirds of the college's students came from conservative Republican families, but Bennington was a liberal institution whose tone was set by its Democratic faculty and the senior students whom they had influenced. Newcomb showed that new students progressively abandoned the republican politics of their parents in favour of New Deal liberalism. At the 1936 presidential election, for example, the Republican candidate was supported by 62 percent of the freshmen, 43 percent of the sophomores, and just 15 percent of the juniors and seniors. In becoming Democrats, the women consciously abandoned their old reference group and identified with their new one. One student said:

> All my life I've resented the protection of governesses and parents. At college I got away from that, or rather, I guess I should say, I changed it to wanting the intellectual approval of teachers and more advanced students. Then I found that you can't be reactionary and be intellectually respectable. [Newcomb 1943, 134, quoted in Bem 1970, 82].

But if Bennington, like most reference groups, rewarded those who accepted its norms, it also functioned as a 'frame-of -reference' group which gave its members new perspectives, new information and apparently compelling arguments for their political views (Bem 1970, 83, citing Newcomb 1943, 136-7). So the women's conversion to Democratic politics was in most cases genuine, and not merely tactical. When they graduated, most chose liberal friends and husbands, selecting new reference groups which reinforced their attitudes. As a result, 60 percent supported the liberal Kennedy over Nixon in the 1960 presidential contest and 90 percent supported Johnson over the arch-conservative Goldwater in 1964 (Bem 1970, 84-5, citing Newcomb, Koenig, Flacks & Warwick 1967, 48-9, 61).

The Bennington case shows that most people will, when they can, choose a reference group which supports their attitudes. It also shows that even in pluralistic Western societies this is not always possible: the conservative young ladies who arrived at Bennington in the 1930s would rarely have done so if its liberal politics had been widely known at the time. In totalitarian societies, however, people's freedom to choose their own reference groups is far more limited, and political differences between reference groups are systematically attacked. The goal is a society in which every reference group mimics the political attitudes of the rulers, and a crucial means of pursuing that goal is linguistic engineering. Careful supervision of what people *say* and what they *write* ensures that virtually every reference group promotes the verbal formulae which express the official ideology. People can see that every group which they want to join apparently endorses that ideology, and that every group rewards those who promote it enthusiastically. They can see that anyone who wants to be accepted, to belong, has to play the game and recite the political formulae which are the precondition of group membership. Nobody dares, however, to call it a game, and everyone seems utterly convinced by the formulae. So the fate of the secret heretic is alienation and isolation. Not surprisingly, most people shift their attitudes in the direction of the language which they have to use in order to be accepted by their reference group. Just as they did at Bennington.

Cognitive Dissonance

The theory of cognitive dissonance, formulated by Leon Festinger (1957), has had a controversial, exciting and extremely fruitful career in social psychology. It generates insights which, at first sight, are counterintuitive, but which seem plausible once the theory has been grasped. It is also supported by some very convincing evidence and continues to generate original hypotheses and research. (See the excellent account of the evidence in Perloff 1993; see also Elliot & Devine 1992, and the debate in *Psychological Inquiry*, 1992, 3(4), 303-56).

Dissonance is a state of psychological discomfort which occurs when a person becomes aware of holding two cognitions (beliefs) which are

psychologically inconsistent, or of holding a belief which is psychologically inconsistent with his or her behaviour. Simple inconsistency between cognitions can cause dissonance by making us look and feel stupid, and by causing frustration when we have to make decisions. However, dissonance is strongest, and the motivation to reduce it greatest, under the following conditions (cf. Festinger 1957; Brehm & Cohen 1962; Aronson 1969; Steele & Liu 1981, 1983; Steele 1988; Wade & Tavris 1993, 350-51; Stone, Wiegand, Cooper & Aronson 1997):

1. The two cognitions are highly inconsistent and very important to those who hold them.

2. The inconsistency in the cognitions is the result of behaviour which was voluntary, producing a feeling of personal responsibility for its consequences.

3. The consequences of the behaviour are irreversible.

4. Cognitions produced by the behaviour are inconsistent with cognitions embodying our idealized self-image, threatening our self-image as honest, kind or decent people.

According to Festinger (1957, 3), 'The existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance'. When the dissonance is linked to behaviour which produces new cognitions inconsistent with our old ones, there are two obvious ways of reducing the discomfort. First, under some circumstances, we can eliminate the behaviour and many of the resulting cognitions . For example, if I am preaching a doctrine in which I do not believe, I can remove the psychological inconsistency and preserve my self-image as an honest person by ceasing to preach that doctrine (cf. Monteith 1993). Alternatively, I can change my beliefs so that they are consonant with my preaching. Dissonance theory predicts that if I continue voluntarily to preach the same doctrine, and if I want to think of myself as an honest person, I will start to believe in my own preaching. There is, in fact, a great deal of evidence that

this is what usually happens (e.g. Nel, Helmreich & Aronson 1969; Steele & Liu 1983; Steele 1988; Cooper & Fazio 1984).

Dissonance theory also predicts that the less I am rewarded for my counter-attitudinal preaching, the more I will believe in it. The reasoning here is that if, say, I am preaching the false doctrine in order to stay out of trouble and keep my job, I will reduce the dissonance by telling myself 'I'm just doing it to stay out of trouble and keep my job - anyone would do the same.' Where this type of rationalization is available, then attitude change is likely to be minimal. If, on the other hand, I have no strong, vested interest in preaching the false doctrine, I cannot justify my behaviour in this way. To maintain my self-image as someone with as much integrity as most people, I will probably try to convince myself that what I have been telling everyone is not so untrue after all. I will thereby reduce dissonance by assimilating my convictions to my preaching. Again, there is strong evidence that this often happens. (See the summaries in Perloff 1993, ch. 10, and Beck 1983, 301-8).

In cases of mild inconsistency between attitudes and verbal behaviour there may be little or no dissonance, and in that case dissonance theory has less to offer than self-perception theory, which I discuss below. However, there are situations in which discrepancies between what we say and what we think produces a great deal of dissonance because they are:

(a) very large
(b) important to us
(c) the result of voluntary action on our part
(d) the cause of irreversible harm to other people
(e) highly threatening to our self-image as kind and honest people.
(Wade & Tavris 1993, 350-1; Perloff 1993, 221-2, 245-9).

In the case above, for example, it may be that I am preaching the virtues of policies which are causing immense suffering at present but which I am claiming will bring even greater rewards in the future. Dissonance theory predicts that, as the evidence of suffering in the present grows, so will my feelings of dissonance, and so will my need to reduce dissonance. It also predicts that, if I continue to promote the policies, I will reduce the

dissonance by believing ever more strongly that the policies will bring future rewards which justify the suffering in the present.

Let us consider another scenario. Suppose an authoritarian government praises and rewards people who accuse their friends, colleagues and family of political crimes, praising such behaviour as a triumph of selfless revolutionary virtue over the selfishness of bourgeois attachments. Suppose, too, that this government also imprisons and tortures the accused, executes some of them, leaves others to die, then makes the remainder social outcasts for the rest of their lives. Under these circumstances, some people will summon up enough revolutionary idealism to denounce their associates. But what if, before making the denunciations, they go through a difficult internal struggle before putting the 'new' virtue of revolutionary selflessness ahead of the 'old' virtue of loyalty to family, friends and colleagues? Dissonance theory predicts:

(a) That their decision to denounce their associates will arouse extreme dissonance because it is inconsistent with the 'old' virtue of loyalty.

(b) That, because the revolutionary idealists cannot undo the consequences of their denunciations, they will reduce the dissonance by 'spreading apart the alternatives' - that is, increasing their commitment to the 'new' virtue which justifies what they did, and reducing their residual attachment to the 'old' virtue which they have betrayed.

What if, too, those who denounce their colleagues think of themselves as good and kind people who would never inflict unnecessary suffering, who would never act unjustly towards others? Here, dissonance theory predicts:

(a) That their decision to denounce their associates will arouse extreme dissonance because they know that it is certain to cause immense suffering.

(b) That they will reduce the dissonance by putting aside their doubts, convincing themselves that those whom they have accused are guilty of all their alleged crimes and that they *deserve* to suffer horribly.

(c) In convincing themselves that their associates deserve such terrible suffering, they will forget their good qualities and remember their bad qualities. They will probably dehumanize them and come to hate them. In short, they will reduce dissonance by blaming their victims.

Finally, dissonance theory predicts a major difference between two groups of people. On the one hand, there are those who think of themselves as good and kind, and who abhor undeserved suffering. On the other hand, there are those who are sadists, who have a callous attitude towards the suffering of other people, or who pride themselves on being willing to break a lot of innocent eggs to make a revolutionary omelette. The act of denouncing colleagues is obviously more psychologically inconsistent with the cognitions of the first group than with the cognitions of the second. Dissonance theory therefore predicts:

(a) That the act of denouncing associates will, other things being equal, arouse far more dissonance amongst members of the first group than amongst members of the second.

(b) That the denunciations will produce a far greater attitude change amongst members of the first group than amongst members of the second. In particular:

I. Members of the first group will experience a greater attitude shift in the direction of the doctrine of 'revolutionary selflessness' which justifies their actions.

II. Members of the first group will experience a greater attitude shift away from the morality of 'loyalty to associates' by which their actions stand condemned.

III. Members of the first group will experience a greater attitude shift in the direction of the belief that the accused are guilty as charged, that they are hateful, that they are less than fully human, and that they deserve their fate.

The implications of dissonance theory for linguistic engineering are clear. First, we can often persuade people to accept policies by engineering a situation in which they experience dissonance as a result of voluntarily *advocating* those policies. The need to remove dissonance will lead them to believe, more and more, in what they say. Thought will follow the word.

Second, we can often change people's attitudes by engineering a situation in which they experience dissonance because they *condemn* other people for politically incorrect views or actions. The need to remove dissonance will make them more convinced than ever that such views and actions are reprehensible, and that those responsible for them are evil people who deserve punishment. It will also tend to convince them that doctrines of revolutionary morality which justify the betrayal of associates are correct, and that traditional codes of loyalty are wrong.

Third, dissonance theory suggests that the attitudes of people who are idealistic and sensitive may in some ways be particularly susceptible to manipulation through linguistic engineering. Their idealism facilitates their recruitment to the revolutionary cause, which promises so much, and it tempts them to verbal acts which express their commitment. Their sensitivity then makes them experience extreme dissonance when they reflect on the consequences of their verbal acts. As a result, they are particularly prone to extreme attitude shifts which reduce dissonance by justifying their verbal acts.

Finally, although I have described the workings of dissonance in general terms, using examples which are not specifically linked to a particular society, these examples are not purely hypothetical. They are based on events and processes in the real world. Linguistic engineering has produced dissonance and attitude change in many periods and places. It will become apparent later in this thesis that the examples which I have used are in fact generalised descriptions of what happened time after time in Mao's China.

Self-perception Theory

The theory of cognitive dissonance had an enormous impact on social psychology in the late 1950s and 1960s because it very effectively challenged the assumption that our attitudes are entirely the product of classical, higher order and operant conditioning. In particular, it discredited the Skinnerian view that our attitudes will necessarily change in directions reinforced by extrinsic rewards. What Festinger and others showed was that dissonance produces attitude change precisely when there are no extrinsic rewards which subjects can use to explain why they are saying and doing things psychologically inconsistent with their existing attitudes. Because they are unable to reduce the dissonance by explaining their behaviour in terms of extrinsic rewards, they are forced to reduce it by making their attitudes more consistent with their behaviour.

However, just as the dissonance theorists demonstrated that the dominant behaviourist tradition had pushed its claims too far, so they too had to admit that dissonance was not as pervasive as they had thought. One of their most effective critics was Daryl Bem (1965, 1967, 1970, 1972), whose self-perception theory was originally put forward at a comprehensive alternative to dissonance theory, but which is best seen as a complementary theory which offers a superior explanation of *some* phenomena which the dissonance theorists once claimed as their own. Both self-perception theory and dissonance theory appear to be correct within their 'proper domain of application' (Fazio, Zanna and Cooper 1977).

Self-perception theory points to mechanisms which operate when we advocate a position which departs only slightly from our existing attitudes, and not in a way which we think important. These mechanisms are particularly likely to play a part when our attitudes are ill-formed and somewhat uncertain. Under these circumstances, we will probably not even become fully aware of the discrepancy between our existing views and the position which we have advocated, let alone feel the discomfort associated with dissonance. Instead, our best guide to what we 'really' think is what we have said: 'I must believe it. Why else would I have said it?' As Bem (1970, 57) puts it, we 'infer [our] own internal states by observing [our] own overt behaviour.'

As with dissonance, self-perception is most effective in producing attitude change when the behaviour is voluntary. If I am *forced* to say 'Chairman Mao is the red, red Sun in my heart', I won't be tempted to infer my attitudes from my statement. I will tell myself that I only said it because I was forced to. By contrast, if I am present at a rally where other people are shouting slogans of Mao worship, and find myself shouting spontaneously along with them, I will be inclined to infer my attitudes from my behaviour and conclude that I love Chairman Mao just like everyone else. In this way, my verbal behaviour can crystallize attitudes which are not fully formed, and it can shift attitudes which are slightly discrepant from the view which I have expressed.

Bem (1970, 66) argues that 'changing an individual's behaviour is one of the ways of causing change in his beliefs and attitudes. His new behaviour provides a source from which he draws a new set of inferences about what he feels and believes.' He is talking about verbal behaviour, as well as other forms of behaviour, so the implications for linguistic engineering are clear. By encouraging, but not forcing, people to say politically correct things which are slightly discrepant from their existing views, we can produce successive small attitude shifts by taking advantage of their propensity to infer their thoughts from their verbal behaviour. Moreover, where people's attitudes are not well formed, we can put words in their mouths which tell them what they think, crystallizing their ideas in a politically correct form. The effects of self-perception on attitude change might not be as dramatic as those produced by dissonance, but they are just as real.

Persuasive Mechanisms and Linguistic Determinism

All of these mechanisms create opportunities for linguistic engineers. However, they give us no reason to believe that we might one day be reduced to automata programmed by Orwellian Newspeak. In the first place, while all of these mechanisms are effective in a statistical sense, not one of them can be guaranteed to produce attitude change in everyone. Instead, there is considerable variability in the extent to which individuals

are susceptible to these mechanisms, and the mechanisms are more effective in some contexts than in others. Consider the following:

1. Higher order conditioning, as a derivative of classical conditioning, works best on people who know little about the person or thing which they are being conditioned to love or to hate (Cacioppo, Marshall-Goodell, Tassinary & Petty 1992).

2. The validity effect is greatly reduced in subject areas in which people claim little knowledge (Arkes, Hackett & Boehm 1989).

3. The effects of mere exposure are much diminished when the number of exposures goes beyond a certain point (Perloff 1993, 59-61).

4. People sometimes reduce dissonance, not by changing their attitudes, but by changing their behaviour, or by apologising for their behaviour and trying to restore their self-image by reminding themselves of their virtues in other areas (cf. Steele 1988). Moreover, under some circumstances people can mistakenly attribute the unpleasant arousal associated with dissonance, not to their inconsistency, but to some other factor. In that case, attitude change does not occur (Perloff, 1993, 242-5).

5. We have seen that self-perception theory, like dissonance theory, works poorly when people say things under compulsion. Moreover, even when there is no compulsion, people by no means always infer their attitudes from their statements. They are quite capable of saying 'Well, that's what I said. But now that I think about it, I don't really believe it.'

6. Young people do not always choose the role models whom their educators and persuaders place before them, and even in a society with totalitarian aspirations it is impossible to ensure that everyone is a worthy role model.

7. Some people remain inwardly, and perhaps outwardly, alienated

from what are supposed to be their reference groups. This was the case at Bennington College (Bem 1970, 82-3), and we shall see that it was also the case in China. Moreover, while rulers with totalitarian aspirations might be able to ensure that all reference groups recite politically correct formulae, it is impossible to ensure that all do it in the right spirit.

These considerations make it clear that the mechanisms of persuasion which we have discussed do not automatically produce persuasion. Whether they do or not depends on the context in which they operate and the characteristics of the individuals to whom they are applied. They are a powerful weapon in the hands of linguistic engineers, but they cannot produce the uniformity which Orwell feared or which some would-be totalitarian rulers have desired.

1.5 Code, Context and Relevance Theory

A fully-fledged Orwellian programme of linguistic engineering can only work if what Sperber and Wilson (1986) call the 'Code Model' of communication is correct. According to this model, languages pair thoughts with phonetic signals according to fixed semantic and syntactic rules. Knowledge of these rules enables the speaker to encode the message and the hearer to decode it. The Code Model implies that the link between the words and the message is strong and direct: if we know the conventions which link words to meanings and if we know the grammatical rules which govern the construction of sentences, we can encode and decode messages. In that case, the prospects of manipulating the contents of people's minds through manipulating language are good: if we ban the words which encode heretical ideas, those ideas cannot be communicated even if they can be entertained privately. Moreover, if we make people recite correctly coded political slogans, we can be sure that if they understand the code they will understand the slogans' message. The Code Model posits a strict, conventional link between phonetic symbols and syntactic structures, on the one hand, and the categories and structures of thought, on the other. If the Code Model is correct, this link should enable direct transmission of the

propagandist's message; it should also make it easier to use manipulation of the symbols as a mechanism for the control of thought.

There is no doubt that the coding of utterances plays a part in communication, but coding *on its own* cannot account for communication. Retrieval of the speaker's meaning depends, not just on knowing the semantic and grammatical 'code', but on a wider process of inference. That process of inference includes the semantic representation(s) of the utterance amongst its premises, but the premises also include relevant contextual assumptions. Moreover, there is no set of rules, no algorithm, which speakers of a language can learn and use mechanically in selecting the relevant assumptions. So the Code Theory is untenable. As Wilson and Sperber (1986) put it:

> The speaker's intentions are not decoded but non-demonstratively inferred, by a process of hypothesis formation and confirmation which, like scientific theorizing and unlike grammatical analysis, has free access to contextual information. The hearer's aim is to arrive at the most plausible hypothesis about the speaker's intentions; but the most plausible hypothesis, in pragmatic interpretation as in science, may still be wrong. [Wilson & Sperber 1986, 585].

This has important implications for linguistic engineering: it means that control of words and their semantic meaning (the 'code') does not guarantee control of either the messages which those words are intended to convey, or of the messages which those who hear or read the words retrieve. The semantic representation of an utterance is only one clue to its pragmatic meaning; the remaining clues are provided by assumptions in the context of interpretation.

We can illustrate the importance of contextual assumptions with respect to four aspects of utterance interpretation (cf. Wilson & Sperber 1986; Sperber & Wilson 1995). First, contextual assumptions are required to flesh out the semantic representation of the sentence into a fully fledged explicature. Consider the following sentence:

(1) She was too cold.

The hearer must use contextual information to determine the referent of the pronoun 'she', to determine whether 'cold' means 'low in temperature' or 'unfriendly', and to clarify what she too cold *for*.

Contextual clues may also be required to determine the illocutionary force of an utterance, as in (2):

(2) You're joining the party.

The hearer must use contextual information to decide whether the utterance is intended as a statement, an order, or even (if the speaker is a New Zealander who ends statements with a rising intonation) a question.

Hearers must not only flesh out the semantic representation of a sentence into an explicature, but they must recover intended implicatures as well. Consider this dialogue:

(3) a. *Yi Yuan:* Would you like some more ice cream?
b. *Chris:* I'm starting to get fat.

In order to recover Chris's implicated refusal, Yi Yuan requires two contextual assumptions: 'Chris does not want to get fat' and 'Eating a lot of ice cream tends to make people fat'.

Finally, it is the context which determines whether an utterance is taken literally, or understood metaphorically or ironically, as in (4) and (5):

(4) They will fight to the death.
(5) You are so kind.

Is (4) referring to actual physical combat and does it mean that someone is literally going to get killed? Or is it simply a metaphorical way of saying that the disputants will never agree to compromise? Only the context can tell. And is (5) intended sincerely or ironically? Again, the semantic representation of the sentence is no help. We need to know the context if

we are to determine whether 'kind', pragmatically, means 'kind', or whether it means 'unkind'.

The most powerful tool for relating utterances to the contextual assumptions which are required to interpret them is Relevance Theory, the creation of Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson (Sperber & Wilson 1986; second edition 1995). The theory corrects and greatly extends insights of the philosopher Paul Grice (1975), and it draws heavily on the information processing approach to human cognition. What follows is an attempt to give an explanation of Relevance Theory which is full enough to be understood by an intelligent general reader, but brief enough to serve the purposes of a thesis whose topic is linguistic engineering, not pragmatic theory.

According to Sperber and Wilson (1995, 46, 47, 265-6), evolutionary processes have fashioned us into 'efficient information processing devices' whose 'cognition is aimed at improving the individual's knowledge of the world' or providing other cognitive benefits. Our biggest problem is that we have limited resources for short-term processing. We can cope only because we are wired to focus on environmental and linguistic stimuli which make the most cost-effective contribution to our cognitive goals, especially the acquisition of knowledge. So we have no interest in messages which tell us only what we already know for certain, or which convey information which we cannot relate to anything in our representation of the world (Sperber & Wilson 1995, 48). Rather, we scrutinize messages for assumptions which interact with our existing assumptions to increase our knowledge or enhance our cognition in other ways.

When an assumption conveyed by a message combines with our existing assumptions in a way which 'contributes positively to the fulfilment of cognitive functions or goals', we say that it has *positive cognitive effects* (Sperber & Wilson 1995, 265), It can have such effects in at least three ways (Sperber & Wilson 1995, 108-117, 265-6):

I. It may provide further evidence for, and hence strengthen, an existing assumption which is not already regarded as certain.

II. It may contradict an existing assumption, displacing it in whole or in part.

III. It may have contextual implications: that is, it may combine with existing assumptions in a process of inference which produces new information.

When an assumption conveyed by a message interacts in these ways with existing assumptions, we can say that it is *relevant in that context.* When it has some positive cognitive effect in one or more of the contexts accessible by an individual, we can say that it is *relevant to that individual.* In both cases, *the degree of relevance is, other things being equal, directly proportional to the positive cognitive effects.* (Sperber & Wilson 1995, 265; Wilson & Sperber 1986, 588).

The qualification 'other things being equal' is necessary because the degree of relevance, within an information processing framework, is also affected by processing effort. Say I ask two friends, 'What time is the party meeting?', and receive the replies in (6) and (7):

(6) It's at eleven o'clock.
(7) It's at eleven o'clock and the sun rose this morning.

Intuitively, (6) is a more relevant answer than (7) in the context of my question, despite the fact that both answers supply information which has precisely the same positive cognitive effects in that context. What makes (6) more relevant than (7) is that the latter also supplies information ('the sun rose this morning') which has no effects in that context - information which indeed has no effects in *any* context which I am likely to access, since I already hold it as certain. So (6) is easier and quicker to process than (7) while yielding the same positive cognitive returns. From an information processing perspective, then, it is more relevant. We can express the general principle involved here as follows: *the degree of relevance is, other things being equal, inversely proportional to processing effort.*

Sperber and Wilson (1995, 260) sum up their argument that humans are wired to maximize cognitive benefits and minimize processing costs in what they call the *First (or Cognitive) Principle of Relevance:*

> *Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance.*

If humans are geared to maximize relevance, a communicator can claim an audience's attention only because the attempt to communicate conveys an implicit *presumption of relevance.* In part, this means that every attempt to communicate comes with a guarantee that the ostensive stimuli (words, gestures, or whatever) are relevant enough to be worth processing. However, as dedicated relevance-seekers, we prefer stimuli whose positive cognitive effects *far* outweigh the costs of processing. This means that communicators who want our full attention must convey the presumption that they will be as relevant as they reasonably can. These considerations give rise to what Sperber & Wilson (1995, 270) call the *Presumption of Optimal Relevance.* It is a presumption that:

> *(a) The ostensive stimulus is relevant enough for it to be worth the addressee's effort to process it.*
>
> *(b) The ostensive stimulus is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences.*

The Presumption of Optimal Relevance underpins what Sperber & Wilson (1995, 158, 260-61) call *The Second (or Communicative) Principle of Relevance:*

> *Every act of ostensive communication communicates the presumption of its own optimal relevance.*

In other words, the Second Principle of Relevance asserts that all attempts at communication involve a guarantee that the ostensive stimulus is worth attending to and is as relevant as can reasonably be expected. This guarantee may prove worthless because, as Sperber & Wilson (1995, 158)

note, 'the world is full of bores' who manifestly but falsely 'intend their audience to believe that they are worth listening to.' Moreover, we need to remember that not everyone who speaks or writes is trying to communicate. Sometimes people deliberately try to avoid being understood, and sometimes the audience's attention is irrelevant, as in the case of a filibuster (Sperber & Wilson 1995, 157, 159). The point remains that genuine communicators intend their audience to believe that what they have to say is optimally relevant. Most failures to achieve optimal relevance are unintentional.

The Second Principle of Relevance is the key to understanding communication. Briefly, when addressees disambiguate ostensive stimuli, they act in accordance with the Presumption of Optimal Relevance which is conveyed by the attempt to communicate: they look for the optimal relevance which has been promised to them. They are geared to pass over interpretations whose positive cognitive effects are not sufficient to justify the processing costs. Indeed, if they cannot find any interpretation which yields positive cognitive effects worth processing, their presumption of optimal relevance prevents them from coming to any conclusion about what interpretation was intended by the communicator. They are simply unable to understand what the utterance means. What happens, however, if there *are* interpretations worth processing? In that case, the addressees are geared to zero in on the interpretation which is most relevant - on the interpretation which maximizes positive cognitive effects relative to processing effort. It is *that* interpretation which best fulfils their presumption that the communicator is trying to be as relevant as she reasonably can.

The Second Principle of Relevance underlies all ostensive communication, whether by words, gestures or significant glances. However, we do not consciously assess ostensive stimuli with the principle in mind, nor do we need to know anything about the principle in order to act in accordance with it. We *take it for granted* that people who are trying to communicate with us are trying to be optimally relevant, and we act on that presumption as we interpret the ostensive stimuli which they direct towards us. Moreover, we do not set out, in a calculated fashion, to assess the relevance of the ostensive stimuli whose relevance we presume: our

minds are programmed to do that *automatically* whenever we presume the relevance of an act of ostensive communication. That is why we are able to interpret most utterances and other ostensive stimuli almost instantaneously.

In trying to be optimally relevant, communicators choose ostensive stimuli which are going to maximize positive cognitive effects relative to processing effort. Usually, the appropriate stimuli will be linguistic, for language is the most precise and efficient way of conveying all but the simplest assumptions. It is relatively precise and efficient because it is a code. As Sperber and Wilson (1995, 167) put it:

> A coded stimulus gives immediate access to a highly determinate set of concepts: the code itself determines which concepts are activated, and moreover assembles them into a logical form which can be directly used as an assumption schema. The context provides ways of completing these assumption schemas into full hypotheses.

I will illustrate the relationship between the coded stimulus and contextual assumptions with an example which I adapt from Wilson & Sperber (1986, 584, 589):

(8) a. *Peter:* Ozzy Osbourne's coming to dinner.
b. *Mary:* I'll bring a bat.

The coded stimulus 'bat' is capable of activating several concepts, including those designated by the following descriptions:

(9) a. A hitting instrument used in table tennis.
b. A furry, flying rodent.

Which of these interpretations of the word 'bat' is chosen depends on the context. If Mary and Peter are mutually aware that Peter has lost his table tennis bat, and that Ozzy likes to play table tennis to work up an appetite before dinner, then she will no doubt expect him to choose (9a) as the referent of 'bat'. But if, on the other hand, Peter has recently told her that Ozzy is a rock star famous for biting the head off a live bat during a performance, she will expect him to choose (9b). She uses the word 'bat'

confident that, in the interpretive context most readily available to Peter, it will not be ambiguous.

What, however, if Mary is mistaken about Peter's assumptions? In that case, Peter will misinterpret Mary or be unable to work out what she means. The responsibility will be Mary's. As Sperber and Wilson (1995, 43) say:

> It is left to the communicator to make correct assumptions about the codes and contextual information that the audience will have accessible and be likely to use in the comprehension process. The responsibility for avoiding misunderstandings also lies with the speaker, so that all the hearer has to do is go ahead and use whatever code and contextual information come most easily to hand.

We can illustrate the effects of a miscalculation about the audience's assumptions using our present example. What if Peter, contrary to Mary's expectations, has *equally* ready access to assumptions about Ozzy's liking for pre-prandial table tennis and to assumptions about his passion for bat cocktails? In that case, both interpretations will spring to mind more or less simultaneously and Peter will be unable to disambiguate the word 'bat'. Mary will have failed in her responsibility to use an ostensive stimulus which activates the correct interpretive assumptions: instead of merely saying 'bat', she should have said 'live bat' or 'table tennis bat' to remove the ambiguity.

The importance of interpretive assumptions means that communicators must continually adjust to the limitations of what Sperber and Wilson call the 'mutual cognitive environment' which they share with their audience. An individual's total cognitive environment, as Sperber and Wilson (1995, 39) define it, is 'the set of all the facts that he can perceive or infer ... It consists of not only all the facts that he is aware of, but also all the facts that he is capable of becoming aware of '. When the communicator and the audience are both capable of knowing that they share some part of their respective cognitive environments, we call the part which they share their *mutual cognitive environment.* It is the existence of mutual cognitive environments which enables communicators to make rational guesses about the codes and contextual assumptions to which the

audience has access, and about which words or other ostensive stimuli will activate just those codes and contextual assumptions necessary for correct interpretation.

The way in which Relevance Theory does justice to the respective roles of linguistic codes and interpretive contexts has important implications for linguistic engineering. One major implication is negative: control of language does not give control of pragmatic meaning. The meanings which audiences infer from utterances vary not only with the linguistic code but also with uncoded contextual assumptions. These assumptions are not a context given in advance of the act of communication, but are recovered during the process of interpretation in accordance with the Second Principle of Relevance. Communicators and linguistic engineers will sometimes guess wrongly about the assumptions which particular audiences will use to interpret utterances, so they can never be sure that people who are being 'programmed' by the endless recitation of political or religious formulae are interpreting those formulae as intended. The idea that if we completely control language we can dictate people's thoughts is as fanciful as the Code Model of interpretation on which it depends.

However, Relevance Theory does have lessons for linguistic engineers who are willing to settle for less than total control of thought. To begin with, it suggests that they should supplement their attempt to impose a uniform linguistic code with an attempt to homogenize the cognitive environments which people bring to the task of interpretation. They will not, of course, succeed completely, for each person's cognitive environment is the product of experiences, memories, circumstances and cognitive abilities which have an inescapable element of particularity. However, a powerful and determined totalitarian regime can increase the overlap between people's cognitive environments in several ways. It can supplement linguistic engineering with a programme of social engineering which reduces diversity and imposes a common education system, common customs, common rituals and common experiences on the whole population. It can also homogenize and re-orient people's cognitive environments by transforming parts of their material environment. In particular, it can destroy all monuments, architecture, ornaments and art which remind people of the diversity of past ages; and it can ensure that

people are constantly exposed to monuments, statues, flags, banners, pictures and posters linked to the assumptions of the new ideology. Under these circumstances the mutual cognitive environment enabling communication between rulers and ruled will be greatly enlarged. The result should be more accurate communication and more uniform interpretation of linguistic drills intended to programme the minds of the ruled.

Relevance Theory also suggests ways in which rulers can manipulate language in order to get their message across more effectively. In particular, it confirms the wisdom of all linguistic innovations which make propagandistic messages easier to process. One such innovation is the introduction of 'Newspeak' in the form of a technical vocabulary which codes the concepts of the official ideology. That ideology can almost certainly be expressed in the old language, but talking about it will be difficult because it will often take many words to express a single, commonly used concept. In other words, the concept is not 'codable' in the old language, and this makes it difficult to use (cf. Brown 1958). The processing advantages of codability are exemplified by our tendency to shorten or 'code' words or expressions which we use frequently - a tendency manifested in Zipf's law, which holds that the more frequently a word is used, the shorter it tends to be (Zipf 1935, cited Carroll 1994, 379). So linguistic engineers need to ensure that the basic concepts of the new ideology are highly codable, then make everyone proficient at using the code. This will reduce the processing costs of ideological pronouncements and thereby increase their relevance.

One way of making sure that the whole population knows the code is to embed its key terms in linguistic formulae which encapsulate the new ideology, then compel everyone to recite the formulae on appropriate occasions. However, formulae - set phrases habitually used in specified contexts - are not simply a means to learning a code. They themselves contribute to the efficiency of communication. On the one hand, they save the speaker the trouble of thinking up something original which is appropriate to the context - a great advantage when there are pressures on short-term memory, or when originality can lead to punishment for 'saying the wrong thing'. On the other hand, formulae reduce the processing effort

of the hearer, who expects to hear them in appropriate contexts, and who is able to process them even before the speaker has finished saying them. (On formulae, see Coulmas 1979, 1981; Kuiper & Haggo 1984; Kuiper & Tillis 1986; Kuiper & Austin 1990; Ji, Kuiper & Shu 1990). So any effective programme of 'Newspeak' is likely to use formulae, in part because they reduce processing effort and increase relevance.

There is another mechanism, too, by which linguistic engineers can use formulae to increase the relevance of propaganda. When people are made to speak in formulae which encapsulate the new ideology, they repeatedly activate schematically stored assumptions linked to that ideology. This facilitates retrieval of those assumptions, making it easier to combine them with new assumptions conveyed by propaganda, and to generate still more assumptions through processes of inference. When this happens, positive cognitive effects multiply and relevance is enhanced.

When formulae which embody the new ideology are recited over and over again, they become so ingrained that they are never forgotten. This makes concepts linked to them key nodes in the network of schemas which integrate assumptions linked to the new ideology. It is not too much to say that they help to structure and stabilize the whole associative network. Effective associative networks, we saw in section 1.3 above, enhance people's memories, enabling them to acquire a far wider range of assumptions likely to interact with the assumptions conveyed by ideological communications. In that way, the recitation of formulae indirectly enhances the relevance of such communications, facilitating their interpretation and enhancing their impact.

Finally, Relevance Theory points to another persuasive mechanism which can be activated by linguistic manipulation: retroactive strengthening (cf. Sperber & Wilson 1995, 115-117). All linguistic engineers need to do is manipulate communicators into saying or writing things which make sense only in the context of assumptions which the linguistic engineers want the audience to accept. Every time that happens, the audience becomes aware that the communicator takes the truth of those assumptions for granted. When the communicator is trusted, this can have powerful persuasive effects, particularly when other communicators are

saying or writing things which are not relevant unless the assumptions in question are true. In other words, Relevance Theory shows that it is possible to pressure people to accept propositions which are not explicitly asserted, but whose truth is taken for granted when they are invoked as the interpretive context for utterances which would otherwise be unintelligible. The theory might have finally discredited the view that control of language enables us to dictate pragmatic meaning, but it gives some hope to linguistic engineers with more modest pretensions.

1.6 A Framework for Multi-factorial Persuasion: Information Processing and the Elaboration Likelihood Model

The study of linguistic engineering inevitably spans several disciplines. To start with, it necessarily embraces several specialisms within linguistics: descriptive lexicology and semantics, to deal with the abolition of old terms, the introduction of new ones, and changes of meaning; pragmatics, to explore the interaction of the linguistic code with the assumptions which form its context of interpretation; sociolinguistics, to relate the language to its social context, which in China is also a political context; and anthropological linguistics, which provides comparative data which bear on the relationship of language to thought.

At its margins, linguistics merges with other disciplines which are essential to the understanding of our topic. Social psychology points to the role of language in producing modelling effects and reference group behaviour, and behaviourist psychology invites us to consider the place of language in higher order conditioning and operant conditioning. Most obviously, though, linguistics cohabits fruitfully with cognitive psychology, which has produced a body of research on the relationship of spoken languages to the language of thought, and which has identified mechanisms through which what we *say* can influence what we *think*. In particular, cognitive psychologists have shown how language affects thought by changing the relative accessibility of our concepts and schemas, by creating dissonance which demands reduction, by making it possible for us to infer what we think from what we say, and by activating the validity effect and the phenomenon of mere exposure.

The approach of this thesis to linguistic engineering is not only multi-disciplinary, but multi-factorial: language affects cognition, not through a single mechanism, but through many. This may be unsatisfactory to those who are looking for a single, overriding cause, but it is a fact. However, it may lessen this dissatisfaction if I can put these diverse mechanisms within a single theoretical framework. As it happens, there is such a framework: *the information processing approach to cognition.* We have seen already that Relevance Theory is an avowed variant of the information processing approach. It is easy enough to show how the other mechanisms can be related to this approach, for they can all be fitted into the Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion, which operates within the information processing paradigm.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model, developed by Petty & Cacioppo (1986), proposes that there are two routes by which persuasive messages change attitudes: a central route, which involves careful thought about the issue-relevant arguments contained in a message, and a peripheral route, where the focus is on cues peripheral to message content (authority of the speaker, applause from the audience, positive images which accompany the message, and so on). People tend to use the central route when (a) they are sufficiently *highly motivated* to incur heavy processing costs in trying to come to the correct conclusion, and (b) when they have the *ability* to process the message intensively because, for example, they possess the relevant knowledge and are free from distractions. They use the peripheral route when they can see too little payoff for incurring the processing costs of hard thinking, or where they lack the ability to process the message intensively.

When people 'elaborate' or think carefully about the issue-relevant arguments contained in persuasive communication, any shift in attitudes will be relatively persistent and resistant to counter-arguments. This is because elaboration involves intensive information processing which integrates the resultant attitudes and supporting assumptions into stable schemas, which are in turn linked to wider associative networks. When attitudes are formed as a result of attending to peripheral cues, however, they tend to fade when the peripheral cues are withdrawn, and they are

likely to crumble when attacked. This is because, for lack of extensive elaboration, they are not integrated with supporting assumptions in a coherent framework of schematic knowledge.

It is easy to relate the persuasive mechanisms discussed in this chapter to the Elaboration Likelihood Model. Perhaps the most crucial mechanism, in terms of this model, is that discussed in section 1.3 above: the manipulation of language to make the concepts and schemas linked to the new world view more accessible than concepts and schemas linked to the old world view. When we change the schemas which people use in analysing arguments and experiences, we alter the workings of the central route processing mechanisms which they use in elaborating ('thinking carefully about') persuasive messages. Their new schemas predispose them to look for arguments which support the new world view, for we have seen that people tend to elaborate persuasive messages and other information in ways which are schema-consistent. (Cf. also Petty & Cacioppo 1986, 19, 111-15). We saw in section 1.3 that there is nothing inevitable about this process; however, we are often resistant to altering our schemas when we encounter mildly recalcitrant information. As a result, schemas made accessible by linguistic engineering can affect the way in which we process information by the central route. The result of central route processing can be enduring (Petty & Cacioppo 1986, 173-95).

Of the other persuasive mechanisms which we have mentioned, the only one likely to involve central route processing is the reduction of cognitive dissonance. Getting rid of dissonance does not necessarily involve extensive elaboration, but it often does. When people are strongly motivated to change deeply held beliefs which are inconsistent with what they have said, they can engage in a great deal of elaboration as they talk themselves into believing that what they have said is right. Strenuous rationalization involves extensive elaboration (Petty & Cacioppo 1986, 222).

The remaining persuasive mechanisms are all peripheral route processes which involve little elaboration. Indeed, we have seen that they are what Petty & Cacioppo (1986, 9) call 'rather primitive affective and associational processes'. Higher order conditioning and operant conditioning are not only effective on rational humans, but on slugs and

snails; mere exposure and the validity effect involve no issue-relevant argument at all; modelling effects and reference group effects are generated by social imperatives, not issue-relevant considerations; and attitude change as a result of self-perception involves only slight cognitive effort, none of it issue-relevant. The implication of the Elaboration Likelihood Model is that attitudes based on these mechanisms, and nothing more, should be relatively easy to change. This in fact seems to be the case (Petty & Cacioppo 1986, 173-95).

The Elaboration Likelihood Model does not suggest that linguistic engineers should focus exclusively on central route processing. Rather, it suggests that they should pursue both central route and peripheral route strategies of persuasion. On the one hand, they should use linguistic engineering to tamper with people's schemas, then give them incentives to put their new schemas to work in elaborating propagandistic messages. On the other hand, they need to recognize that people will often be deterred by the processing costs of extensive elaboration, and will resort to peripheral cues as a more economical way of deciding what to think. In that case, the peripheral cues need to be carefully engineered and plentiful. In information processing terms, a dual strategy is likely to be by far the most effective.

1.7 Timeless Theories and Empirical Case Studies

All of the persuasive mechanisms mentioned in this chapter show a significant statistical effectiveness, but that does not mean that they necessarily affect all people in all circumstances. In fact, they do not. Some people, we have seen, are more resistant to them, and under some circumstances their effects are weak. This means that we cannot simply assume a certain level of effectiveness, then project it onto a particular case of linguistic engineering like the Cultural Revolution. Instead, we have to use the theory, rather tentatively, as a heuristic, combining it with solid research into the actual historical record. We need to discover which techniques of linguistic engineering were used, under what circumstances and with what effect. In short, we need to draw on the findings and emulate the skills of the historians and political scientists who have written

about China and the Cultural Revolution. Theory is not a substitute for research into actual historical cases, but its complement.

If the large body of theory discussed in this chapter is soundly based, it will serve as a heuristic which illuminates the case of linguistic engineering during the Cultural Revolution. It will tell us what to look for, without making it a foregone conclusion that we will find it. It will suggest to us mechanisms which explain the patterns which we detect. It will even allow us, tentatively, to fill small gaps in the historical evidence. But the theory will not go unchecked. Despite gaps in the record, the sources are abundant and they give us a record of attitudes and behaviour which is independent of the theory discussed in this chapter. As a result, if the theory is not soundly based, it will at many points fail to make sense of the historical evidence. We could find, for instance, that techniques of linguistic engineering had few effects on people's schemas, that people experienced extreme dissonance without acting to reduce it by changing either their attitudes or their behaviour, or that the people who were most susceptible to higher order conditioning were those who were best informed rather than those who were most ignorant. Any of these discoveries would cast doubt upon some aspect of the theoretical approach outlined in this chapter. If, however, we were to find that most people adopted the schematic knowledge structures drilled into them by linguistic engineering, that those who experienced dissonance changed either their attitudes or their behaviour, and that those most swayed by higher order conditioning were the least well informed, this would constitute a vindication of relevant parts of the theory. We could say that these aspects of the theory not only make sense of what happens in the laboratory, but of what happened in China during the Cultural Revolution.

The emphasis in the chapters which follow is on the great experiment in linguistic engineering in Mao's China, especially during the Cultural Revolution. The theory will be used to cast light, where it can, on the Chinese experience. At the same time, it will be possible to test aspects of the theory, and to say something about the general phenomenon of linguistic engineering. These wider concerns are present, but implicit, throughout the historical chapters of the thesis. They are addressed explicitly in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 2

LINGUISTIC ENGINEERING BEFORE THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

1.1 Origins of Linguistic Engineering in China

The policies of linguistic engineering which were implemented throughout China after 1949 did not emerge from nowhere. Some of their features fitted easily into Chinese tradition, some were borrowed from the theory and practice of thought control in the Soviet Union, and some drew on ideas which Mao had developed when working as a political agitator in the 1920s. The whole package of policies, more or less, was trialled in the revolutionary crucible of Yan'an from the late 1930s and especially during the rectification of Party members in 1942-44.

While there were no real precedents in Chinese tradition for Mao's policies of linguistic engineering, there were beliefs and practices which made those policies easier to accept. One was the Confucian claim that many aspects of people's character were not fixed parts of human nature, but could be modified by education. This fell well short of the Maoist doctrine that when someone matures 'The kind of person he grows up to be depends entirely on the kind of education given him by his objective environment.' (Munro 1977, 83, citing Wen Wei, *China Youth*, 7 May 1962). It did, however, justify the belief that intensive education was an effective means of changing people very much for the better. So people in China were less likely than people in many other countries to attach weight to unalterable features of human nature, or to believe that individual temperaments and abilities are fixed by karma, by fate, or by genetic endowment. This made it easier to be optimistic about the possibility of creating 'new people' by 're-educating' them through programmes of linguistic and social engineering.

More directly relevant to linguistic engineering was the traditional Chinese emphasis on rote learning, not simply as a method

of acquiring knowledge, but as an aid to virtue. Children in imperial China were made to recite moral maxims in 'the belief that 'repeated memorization and chanting aloud would, with time, imprint the moral message indelibly in the mind.' (Chan, Madsen & Unger 1984, 76). This was also the rationale for testing candidates for imperial office on their ability to remember the classical Confucian texts, which were held to contain 'the Truth concerning virtue.' (Unger 1982, 68-70). It was believed that when magistrates educated in this way carried out their duties, the appropriate passages would come readily to mind and guide their decisions. This was a far less systematic and far-reaching anticipation to the linguistic engineering of the communist era, when the chanting of slogans and the constant repetition of Mao's words was used to make 'correct' thought sink into the Chinese people's minds.

An important aspect of linguistic engineering under Mao was that people were not only required to say certain things but to use exactly the right words when saying them. This rigid relationship between content and form was grossly exaggerated under Mao, but it was an exaggeration of something far stronger in Chinese culture than in Western culture: the idea that many sentiments should be expressed using set verbal formulae as a mark of propriety and earnestness. As Perry Link (1992, 10) observes, 'To a Westerner, these formulations may seem to be clichés - indicative of unoriginality and even hypocrisy in those who repeat them. But in China, people often repeat the standard phrases with sincerity, to signal true feelings and moral commitment.' So the formulaic nature of Maoist Newspeak, while constricting to the Chinese, was for them less alien than for most Westerners.

While it is possible to find traditional antecedents of some aspects of Mao's linguistic engineering, it would be a mistake to stress them. The fact remains that in traditional China there was nothing approaching the centralized manipulation and control of language which was forced on the Chinese people under Mao. The traditional Chinese state was too weak and penetrated only lightly into society, so it was incapable of implementing radical policies of linguistic engineering even if it wanted to. In the cities, people had a large degree of independence of the state, their lives dominated by families, clans and *guanxiwang* - social networks based on the reciprocal giving

of favours. In the villages people were more independent still. Indeed, as Sun Yat-sen lamented in 1924:

> The Chinese people have shown the greatest loyalty to family and clan with the result that in China there have been family-ism and clan-ism but no real nationalism. Foreign observers say that the Chinese are like a sheet of loose sand. [Whyte 1974, 1].

Mao all but destroyed the clans, he subordinated the family to the state, and he extended the state's power into the most distant villages. Under him, the Chinese people ceased to be 'like a sheet of loose sand' and began to act together, taking orders from the centre. It was this, not Chinese tradition, which laid the foundation of a programme of large-scale linguistic engineering.

Mao's linguistic engineering owed more to the example of the Soviet Union than to Chinese tradition. Marx had assumed that with the abolition of class society the natural goodness of human beings would flower. The Bolsheviks, however, had to sway people's minds in order to bring about the revolution, and they knew the power of crude slogans. 'People for the most part ... don't know how to *think*,' said Lenin in 1913, 'they only *learn words by heart*.' (Young 1991, 208). After the revolution of 1917, the Bolsheviks abolished the old class system but there was still no sign of the society of virtuous revolutionaries which they had hoped for. So they resorted to systematic and aggressive attempts to remake people's minds (Munro 1977, 8-15). Control of language was central to their approach. Lenin stated that the Communist Party's most critical task was 'the selection of language', while Stalin saw language an 'an instrument of struggle and development of society' - an instrument which was inseparable from thought (Young 1991, 126, 211). L.O. Reznikov summed up Soviet orthodoxy thus: 'Marxism teaches us that language reasserts itself not only as a means of communication ... but also as a powerful tool which can be used to affect thoughts, feelings and especially behaviour, as well as, ultimately, the material reality.' (Young 1991, 211).

The Soviet model was well known to Chinese Marxists, as were Stalin's views on linguistics. Indeed, as Paul Serruys (1962, 17) has

observed, 'in China probably more than in any other Communist country, the articles and letters of Stalin concerning the true Marxist views on language remained the fundamental handbook of directive norms and principles for linguistics.' In particular, Chinese linguists accepted Stalin's doctrine that language and thought are inseparable. Serruys (1962, 60-61) summarizes the views of the leading Chinese linguists, based on their reading of Marx and Stalin:

> Language is the immediate reality of thought (Marx). Ideas cannot exist separate from language. The true nature of thought is that it is realized in and with language. Unless thought has been fixed and recorded in language it cannot exist. Pure "naked thought" is non-existent (Stalin).

In other words, we think in the language which we speak, or at least we cannot think without that language.

Long before Stalin began to make his pronouncements on linguistics, however, the Chinese communists were learning the power of words through their own experience of propaganda work and ideological struggle. In his 1927 'Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan', for example, Mao noted that communist-organised peasants' associations had made 'mass meetings' and 'simple slogans' an effective means of propaganda:

> "Down with imperialism!" "Down with the warlords!" "Down with the corrupt officials!" and "Down with the local bullies and bad gentry!" - these political slogans are flying about everywhere, entering into the heads of adults, youngsters, old men, children and women in countless villages, and coming out of their mouths ... From now on we should utilize every opportunity to enrich the content and clarify the meaning of those simple slogans. [Mao 1927, 49-50].

Mao also recommended that people who had committed minor political offences be induced to write self-criticisms - a standard language-based technique of thought reform which activated counter-attitudinal assumptions (cf. Mao 1927, 36). The main themes of Mao's writings in these years are the mobilization of popular revolutionary consciousness and the rectification of ideological errors by Party members. It is clear that 'he was deeply concerned with the problem of propaganda,

agitation, and ideological reform, and that he was constantly experimenting with methods or techniques of political persuasion.' (Yu 1964, 45).

The techniques of persuasion which Mao and his lieutenants had perfected were put into practice during the Communist Party's long exile in Yan'an (1935-47). Mao had become Party Chairman in January 1935, and linguistic engineering was one of the tools which he used to consolidate both his position within the Party and the Party's standing amongst the peasants. He made Yan'an into a 'student city' with some 34 institutions for the education and re-education of Party, military and government cadres, and he used these institutions to create a revolutionary 'discourse community' united and empowered by a special language, uniformity of theory and the universal acceptance of Maoist myths (Apter & Saich 1994, esp. chs 3, 4, 7-9 and appendix). Members of that community used the language as they learned, told and retold carefully scripted stories which led up to Mao's emergence as China's guide and saviour: the story of China's imperial decline, the story of the battle between the Communist Party and the Guomindang, and the story of Mao's triumph over misguided or treacherous opponents within the Party (Apter & Saich 1994, ch. 3). At Yan'an, new recruits learned the language of Marxist philosophy - 'universals and particulars', 'ideas and representation', 'materialism and idealism', 'reflection and reality', 'concrete and abstract', 'theory and practice', 'unity of opposites' and so on (Apter & Saich 1994, 227-8; cf. Mao 1937a, 1937b). They also learned the language of class analysis, so that they could differentiate the compradors from the national bourgeoisie, assess the revolutionary potential of the petty bourgeoisie, distinguish the proletariat from the semi-proletariat, exploit the dissatisfactions of the lumpen-proletariat, plot the dispossession of the landlords, reassure then betray the rich peasants, co-opt the middle and upper middle peasants, and mobilize the poor and lower-middle peasants. (For most of this terminology, see Mao 1926, 1933).

In Yan'an, the cadres learned the new language and the Maoist scripts through lectures, personal study, and incessant discussion, both formal and informal. Much of that discussion took place in small groups inspired by the 'cells' which Lenin had developed in the Bolshevik Party (Whyte 1974, 23-24). In those groups, the cadres went

through a process of 'exegetical bonding' produced by the intensive analysis in small groups of prescribed Marxist and Maoist texts (Apter & Saich 1994, ch. 8). They had to speak in the language of the texts, apply them to their own lives, and submit to the group detailed and often humiliating critiques of their own past behaviour. This whole process of 'criticism and self-criticism' was carefully supervised, deviant interpretations were corrected , and those who stood out against the official line were isolated and attacked. Only when they confessed their errors with every appearance of sincerity were they accepted back into the group. 'Exegetical bonding' reached a peak during the Party rectification campaign of 1942-44, when it was supplemented by terror in the form of a so-called 'Rescue Campaign' directed at alleged spies and traitors. At the end of it all, the cadres spoke the new language, they all embraced outwardly and usually inwardly the assumptions linked to that language, and they rejoiced in their acceptance as 'comrades' by other members of the group. They felt 'both a sense of relief at having "passed the test" and pride at being admitted into the new order.' (Apter & Saich 1994, 274). The transformation was profound:

> the last reserves of individualism were wiped out, completing the conveyance of self to collectivity ... People felt themselves transformed from within, by their own efforts as well as the efforts of those around them. Yan'an changed drastically from an essentially voluntaristic community into something much more rigoristic, a discourse community in which structures were more highly institutionalized, norms internalized, and behaviour socialized. [Apter & Saich 1994, 263-64].

The exegetical bonding which re-made the Yan'anites' minds was effective partly because they were searching for a transcendent truth and *wanted* to be converted. However, its power also stemmed from the fact that the discourse generated by the texts activated the entire pantheon of persuasive mechanisms discussed in the last chapter. That discourse modelled 'correct' thought, its universal use subjected the Yan'anites to powerful reference group effects, it reinforced schemas which gave a revolutionary slant to the interpretation of experience, it reinforced 'correct' assumptions through retroactive strengthening, it promoted conditioning by its deployment of positive and negative terms, it led people to like the new political jargon through 'mere exposure', it made unsupported statements sound plausible through

the validity effect, and it led people with unformed views to infer what they *thought* from what they *said*. Finally, because the whole process of exegetical bonding was so intense, so painful, it gave most who survived it a life-long commitment to the cause. They simply could not bear the dissonance which would result if they recognized that all their study, all their suffering, had produced, not truth, but illusion.

It was the Yan'anites who, under Mao, dominated the Party until the Cultural Revolution. They were the ones who supervised the vast programme of linguistic engineering in China as a whole after 1949. They were well equipped to do this, for in Yan'an they had acquired 'a meta-language embodied in key texts'. This language used the grammar of standard Chinese, but it had a specialized vocabulary linked to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, and it had an extensive array of formulaic responses embodying 'correct' thought on history, theory, the revolutionary situation and norms of personal conduct. Its use in appropriate contexts could activate powerful persuasive mechanisms; it 'provided a logical grid for the collective interpretation of experience'; and it directed 'the ways in which people would encounter, mediate, and share knowledge and experience in order that identities would be redefined and the discourse community become one's primary affiliation.' (Apter & Saich 1994, 265). The task of the Party leaders and veteran cadres after 1949 was to teach this meta-language to the host of new cadres who were recruited to run the country, and to translate it into simplified slogans, formulae and narratives which they could present to the Chinese masses. This was fundamental to their task of linguistic engineering.

2.2 The Institutional Basis of Linguistic Engineering

As Apter & Saich (1994, 244) have noted, 'Mao knew perfectly well that his was a discourse community, and if the discourse somehow eluded his control, the leakage and erosion of power would be great.' This was why he was so concerned to control those with the power to promote alternative discourses, especially intellectuals and others with access to the media. It also explains why, when he extended the discourse community from Yan'an to the whole of China, he secured Communist Party dominance over newspapers, journals, books, radio, cultural

productions, mass organizations and the educational system. This apparatus of control was fundamental to Mao's rule. It was also a pre-requisite of linguistic engineering.

As the Communist Party established effective control after 1949, the manipulation of public opinion at a national level became the special responsibility of the central Propaganda Department in Beijing, headed by Lu Dingyi. This department supervised ideological research, newspapers, journals, radio, literature, art and culture, schools and universities, and the indoctrination of cadres. It monitored and sometimes directed the extensive propaganda work carried out by other central agencies of the Party and the state, such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, the New China News Agency, the Party Press Commission and the Publications Commission.

The central Propaganda Department was technically the servant of the Party's Central Committee and in practice responsible to the Party's highest leaders in the Politburo Standing Committee and the Secretariat (Lieberthal 1995, 158-62). It formed the apex of a massive propaganda hierarchy which was integrated with the Party organization at every level. The Party Committee in each province had its own propaganda department, and below that the Party Committee in each county and city had a propaganda department as well. At the very bottom of the hierarchy, each Party branch had its own propaganda committee. While lower levels of the hierarchy were expected to show initiative in discovering better ways of carrying out their instructions, they had no freedom to deviate from them and the whole system was tightly controlled. Local Party branches, for example, were not free to choose the slogans used during mass, nationwide campaigns, but had to make sure that people shouted slogans approved by the central Propaganda Department in Beijing (Yu 1964, 74).

In the early years after the revolution, intermediate levels of the propaganda hierarchy produced 'propaganda outlines' to tell Party members what they should say on particular issues. They also provided more detailed 'propaganda handbooks' which not only told propagandists what issues to stress, but also gave them background information, material for inclusion in 'wall newspapers' or 'blackboard newspapers', cartoons which could be reproduced by local artists, songs

for use in mass meetings, and advice on propaganda methods. From the mid-1950's, however, these handbooks were phased out, and their functions were taken over by Party newspapers, magazines, and instructions to propagandists broadcast over the radio (Yu 1964, 76-8).

In 1951, Party committees at every level set up propaganda networks consisting of Party members, members of the New Democratic Youth Corps, model workers, people in responsible positions and revolutionary activists. These propagandists were responsible for ensuring that the people in their charge knew and accepted what the Party wanted them to believe. They organized group discussions and newspaper reading groups, kept propaganda bulletin boards supplied with new material, put up posters, encouraged people to listen to radio broadcasts and attend meetings, and engaged them regularly in propaganda-laced conversation. These propaganda networks fulfilled an important function in the early years of Communist rule, but after 1953 they atrophied as their functions were taken over by work units, neighbourhood committees, village cadres, mass organizations and teams of agitators associated with the never-ending political campaigns. (Yu 1964, 78-89; Liu 1971, 115-17).

In the cities, people's lives were closely supervised. In residential areas, they came under the watchful eye of neighbourhood committees, most of them dominated by middle-aged or old female cadres. The most powerful agent of Party control over most people's lives, however, was the work unit (*danwei*) attached to every place of employment, whether it be a factory, government office, educational institution, hospital or shop. The work unit was headed by a Party committee under a Party secretary, and it assumed all the functions of the old clans, and more. It ensured the education of the young, provided medical care and retirement pensions, controlled employment, allocated housing, arranged domestic repairs and dispensed ration coupons. People could not travel without the unit's permission and without its co-operation in providing a letter of introduction to other units where they would require accommodation. Like the old clans, the unit was entitled to interfere in people's private lives. It could inspect incoming mail, and it arbitrated disputes, provided informal marriage counselling, and sometimes influenced the choice of marriage partner. Ideally, it was able to provide accommodation next to the workplace,

and a wall could be built around the perimeter to mark the unit's identity.

Through the work units, especially, and the neighbourhood committees, the Party was able to organize meetings, disseminate propaganda, monitor interpretation of the message and supervise behaviour. It was also able to set up political study groups, newspaper reading groups and radio listening groups, and to establish processes of criticism and self-criticism in small groups (*xiao zu*). Under these circumstances, the Party had no difficulty in implementing policies of linguistic engineering - ensuring that all city dwellers learned the new revolutionary language and, at least in public, used it in appropriate contexts to say prescribed, politically correct things. It was less successful at ensuring that people used that language within the family and amongst close friends. As Dittmer (1987, 58) has observed:

> Language itself became bifurcated: the heroic public language was used to satisfy ever more probing demands for evidence of thought reform, whereas the private language preserved the traditional norms that kept friendship and ties alive. The two discourses were kept apart as a result of conflicting social demands, but each could be used in its appropriate context.

In the villages, the principal agencies of control were Party committees headed by a Party secretary. Communist Youth Leagues were set up to recruit and train promising members of the younger generation, while in some periods Poor and Lower-Middle Peasants' Associations were organized to consolidate the prestige, pride and nominal leadership of the class which provided the Party with its strongest support. Party organization in the villages was strong enough to enable considerable linguistic engineering, but there were difficulties: the illiteracy of many peasants handicapped attempts at instruction; cadres were often illiterate or of low quality; the isolation of many villages created problems, especially in the earlier years; and the prevalence of local dialects meant that many peasants were unable to understand radio broadcasts originating in the major centres. Because of these obstacles, the institutional basis of linguistic engineering was weaker than in the cities. Political meetings were frequent, but newspaper reading groups, study groups, and small groups for purposes of criticism were uncommon. In some villages

such groups were not organized until the Campaign to Study and Apply Mao Zedong's Thought in 1964-66, while in others they did not appear until the Cultural Revolution entered its institutional phase after 1968 - and even then only sporadically (Whyte 1974, 135-66; Liu 1971).

It was the Party's determination to spread its message which inspired its literacy campaigns and policies of language reform. In 1952, the government set up a committee to direct reform of the language. Its first measure was to publish a list of the 1,500 most frequently used characters, urging publications intended for popular consumption to use characters from the list wherever possible. The list included many more words related to the lives of workers and peasants than earlier lists, as well as many words related to politics and class structure (Serruys 1962, 70; Liu 1971, 17). Then in 1956 the State Council set about making the written language easier to learn by abolishing some old characters and beginning the process of simplifying many more. The initial list of 486 simplified characters showed an average reduction from sixteen strokes per character to eight strokes (Lehmann 1975, 46). A much longer list of simplified characters was issued in 1964, and the number of 'radicals' - basic components used to classify characters - was reduced from 214 to 189. This reform caused a lot of anguish to many older, literate Chinese, and it has sometimes been interpreted as an attempt to ensure that 'The Chinese classics, and to some extent all the ancient modes of thought they embody and inculcate, would therefore be inaccessible to peasants who could read only the new script.' (Young 1991, 205). However, the reform does not seem to have been motivated by a desire to destroy China's classical heritage, for in this period the Party continued to approve publication of classical works in the belief that it could teach people to detect and reject the false ideology which they contained. It was only during the Cultural Revolution that the goal of obliterating the past, rather than criticising it, took hold under the influence of youthful Red Guards and the more extreme Maoists.

The final aspects of language reform were the introduction of *pinyin*, an alphabetic form of writing, and the promotion of a *putonghua* or 'common language' based essentially on the Beijing

variant of the North Chinese dialect[1] which is spoken by perhaps two-thirds of the population. The two reforms were linked, because *pinyin* could be used as a guide to pronunciation and was therefore very handy in teaching *putonghua* to speakers of other forms of Chinese. The development of *putonghua* was essential if people throughout China were to be able to listen to the same propaganda broadcasts and understand visiting cadres without the aid of an interpreter. It also helped centralized manipulation of the spoken language, avoiding the need for constant translations into local dialects. Unfortunately for the linguistic engineers, older Chinese speakers of regional dialects were slow to learn the new 'common language', although the introduction of *putonghua* into schools produced many competent speakers amongst the younger generation. (In general, see Serruys 1962; Lehmann 1975, 48-54; Liu 1971, 17-21).

Communication of the Communist Party's message was hindered by widespread illiteracy, estimated at 80 or even 90 percent of the population in 1949 (Liu 1986, 310). In an effort to produce a rapid turnaround, the government sponsored numerous adult literacy campaigns. Some of them claimed amazing results, which proved on investigation to be fictitious. In 1964, Guo Moruo, Director of the Academy of Sciences, wrote:

> For more than ten years, we have been trying to eradicate illiteracy among the people. But our motherland is still a nation with masses of illiterates and semi-literates. Some counties once claimed that they had become literate counties. Yet soon they lapsed back into being illiterate counties. [*People's Daily*, 3 May 1964, quoted in Liu 1971, 23].

More solid results came from the massive expansion of the education system, with the number of primary schools increasing from 346,800 in 1949 to 1,681,900 in 1965, and the number of secondary schools growing from 5,216 to 80,993 over the same period . As a result,

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[1]I use the term *dialect* in its Chinese sense. The Chinese word is *fangyan* which means, literally, 'region speech' or 'place speech'. It refers to all regional or local varieties of speech used by the Han people, as distinct from the 'common language' (*putonghua*). Western scholars, of course, use the term *dialect* in a variety of other senses, none of them suited to a discussion of the rise of *putonghua*.

illiteracy amongst the younger generation steadily declined, so that only 23.5 percent of the population over 12 years of age was classified as illiterate or semi-illiterate in the mid-1980s (Liu 1986, 310; Nathan 1986, 161).

Language reform and literacy campaigns were intended partly to increase the effectiveness of the system of mass communications through which the Party tried to ensure the penetration of its message into every part of the country and into all sections of society. A vital part of that system was the press, which was used to communicate with Party committees and crucial literate minorities throughout the country. Through it, the Party kept people with power and influence up to date with party policy, it provided them with propaganda material, and it taught them the new concepts and slogans to be used in the manipulation of language. The press played a crucial role in linguistic engineering and under Communist Party rule it expanded rapidly, with the combined circulation per issue of all newspapers increasing from 3 million copies in 1950 to almost 21 million in 1959 (Liu 1971, 134). This circulation was still small, relative to the total population, but the number of people who were directly influenced by the press was considerably higher because work units, neighbourhood committees and some village cadres organized newspaper reading groups. In these groups stories were read aloud and then discussed, enabling even illiterates to know what was in the newspapers. However, these groups were more an urban phenomenon than a rural one, although attempts were made to establish reading groups in villages during mass campaigns (Liu 1971, 139-42; Nathan 1986, 157-62).

Many newspapers were published directly by the Party at national, provincial and local levels, and the rest were controlled by the Party. Their content and language were strictly monitored and received direct input from the centre. This input came partly from the New China News Agency, supervised by the State Council, which distributed selected foreign news to all Chinese newspapers and national news to all regional and local newspapers. Direct input also came from the *People's Daily*, the official organ of the Central Committee, from the *Liberation Army Daily*, organ of the General Political Department of the Ministry of Defence, and from the official Party journal, *Red Flag*. Editorials and articles from these 'two

newspapers and one journal' were reprinted by publications lower in the hierarchy, and the terminology and slogans which they used to discuss particular issues were copied by journalists at lower levels.

The Party also controlled the publication and distribution of books. At the national and regional levels, People's Publishing Houses produced books on 'political theories, policies and current events', while specialized companies were given the task of publishing works in other fields. By 1956 there were 40 national and 101 regional publishing houses, and the number of titles had grown from 966 in 1950 to 14,070 in 1956. The books were distributed through the Party-controlled New China Bookstore, which had a monopoly (Liu 1971, 147-9, 197-8). Books were, of course, even less accessible to most people than newspapers until the Cultural Revolution compelled even illiterate peasants to carry a symbolic copy of the 'Little Red Book'.

Radio was also controlled by the Party. At the top of the hierarchy there was the Central People's Broadcasting Station (Radio Beijing), the voice of the Central Committee. Below that were provincial and municipal People's Broadcasting Stations, controlled by the propaganda departments of the Party committees at each level. The number of such stations increased from 54 in 1951 to 141 in 1962 (Liu 1971, 118-20, 187). At the local level, Party-controlled radio stations were established in every county seat. Because few peasants had radios, these stations were linked by wires to the villages, where loudspeakers proclaimed their message in market places, workplaces, recreation halls, dormitories and sometimes even in private homes. The number of these 'wired' stations increased from a mere eight in 1949 to 1,975 in 1964, while the number of loudspeakers grew from 500 to 6,000,000. By then, it was claimed, 95 percent of the counties and towns had been linked to this network, although it is not clear how thoroughly it penetrated into the villages. (Liu 118-29; Yu 1964, 123-136; Nathan 1986, 163-4).

After taking power, the Communist Party destroyed the existing film industry, then built a new industry under its own control. Its purpose, said the *People's Daily*, was 'to educate the people in patriotism and socialism' and 'to lift people's cultural standards.' (Quoted Liu 1971, 159). Chinese-made feature films increased from

one in 1951 to 77 in 1959, while the number of newsreels and documentaries increased from 36 to 155. They were supplemented by dubbed versions of 'progressive' foreign films and documentaries, many of them from the Soviet Union until the Sino-Soviet split in 1960 made them 'revisionist'. The number of cinemas grew from 596 in 1949 to 2,000 in 1964, but the most spectacular growth was in the number of mobile projection teams, which leaped from 100 in 1949 to 12,000 in 1964. These teams travelled from village to village, often on foot, with a horse or a donkey to carry their equipment. Since many of the films were incomprehensible to peasants who knew only the local dialect, the teams were expected to explain to the peasants what was going on. The films were supplemented with propaganda sheets and information provided over loud speakers, and they were followed by discussion. As a result of the teams' efforts, by 1964 the average peasant was reported to see five movies a year. (Details from Liu 1971, 157-73, 199-202).

How effective was the Party in ensuring that people heard its message? Some suggestive data were collected by Paul J. Hiniker in a survey of some 400 former mainland residents in Hong Kong in 1964 and 1965 (Hiniker 1966, cited in Liu 1971, 168). National projections based on this data give the following rates of reception of four major forms of communication - meetings, films, radio and newspapers:

Meetings: 96% Films: 70% Radio: 58% Newspapers: 40%

These patterns of reception are not surprising in a predominantly rural and illiterate society. Newspapers may have played a vital role in keeping cadres and the literate élite in tune with the latest political and linguistic trends, but even newspaper reading groups did not make them the most important *direct* source of information for most people. Radio had not yet achieved the astonishing coverage of the mid-1970s, when on one estimate there were 141,000,000 loudspeakers reaching into 95 percent of production brigades and teams and 65 percent of rural households (Nathan 1986, 163). The large audiences which attended films were a tribute to the dedication and effectiveness of the mobile projection teams, consisting mainly of young women. What is most striking, though, is the Party's effectiveness in reaching virtually the entire population through a never-ending succession of meetings,

some large, some small, some with extensive audience participation, some dominated by speakers on a stage. This form of direct, oral communication was admirably suited to the needs of a largely illiterate population, and it was well within the power of a Party whose power touched virtually everyone. It had the advantage, too, that it brought everyone into contact with the cadres and with other comrades - contact which was both political and personal.

It was personal contact and supervision which made possible the Party's techniques of linguistic engineering. People were not just bombarded with propaganda and left alone to reform themselves. Rather, they were persuaded or pressured into political participation. In many contexts, they were expected to contribute, and most did so in order to avoid being labelled politically backward. To participate, they had to know the terminology, they had to know the oral formulae, they had to know the 'correct' things to say. And what they knew, they had to apply. So in all political contexts - which increasingly meant all public contexts - they had to use the new language of revolution to say the appropriate revolutionary things. In this way they were drawn into active participation in the Chinese Communist Party's great project of linguistic engineering. What that meant and what effects it had before 1966 is the subject of the remaining sections of this chapter.

2.3 Formulae, Codability and Processing Efficiency

Any government which wants to convert people to a new world view and a new political, social and economic order is in the business of imparting information - a great deal of information. If it is to succeed, it must try to minimize the effort of processing that information. One way of doing this, which is especially useful in a largely illiterate society, is to code the information in formulae. The formulae can be learned by heart, serving as a reminder of other information; and, once they are learned, they become a standardised shorthand which makes communication swift and economical. I will illustrate this by analysing two types of formulae which were deliberately fostered in Mao's China: numerical terms and keyword slogans.

Numerical terms have a long history in China, where they have been a popular way of grouping together maxims, virtues, ideas or any items with qualities in common. In former times, any half-educated Chinese could identify the 'Four Books' and the 'Five Classics' which were the basis of the imperial civil service exams, and even uneducated people knew the 'Five Most Important Human Relationships' and could recite the 'Three Obediences' and the 'Four Virtues' which Confucian ethics prescribed for women. These formulae served two functions. First, they were an aid to memory, for they organized information schematically, linking the individual items to a central concept which provided a clue which assisted their recall. This was particularly useful in a society with a large number of illiterates who were unable to store information in written form and had to keep it in their heads. Second, once numerical formulae had been mastered, they were an aid to communication, for they 'coded' a number of sometimes lengthy items into two or three words, making it unnecessary to spell them out them every time they were mentioned.

In Mao's China, numerical formulae were used on an unprecedented scale because never before had the entire population been expected to acquire so much new information. Many of the formulae were devised by the central Party leaders, but others were devised by local cadres and occasionally by ordinary peasants and workers as a way of coping with information overload. Formulae developed locally were sometimes picked up by the national media and publicised throughout the country as a whole (Li 1957a, 33-49).

Numerical formulae devised by the Party leaders were often associated with national campaigns. Soon after coming to power, for example, the Party organized all Christians into the 'Three Selfs' (*san ziji*) movement, whose objective was to ensure that the Chinese Church was self-reliant in three ways: free from foreign funds, free from foreign influence, and free from Vatican control (Spence 1991, 534). Then the country was mobilized in support of two great, simultaneous campaigns: the 'Three-Anti' (*sanfan*) movement, which sought to purge the cadres of corruption, waste and bureaucracy; and the 'Five-Anti' (*wufan*) movement, which attacked capitalists for bribery, tax evasion, theft of state property, cheating on government contracts, and stealing state economic information for speculative purposes. In the case of all

three campaigns, the numerical formulae were enriched by additional information supplied through the press, public meetings and study groups. In this way the formulae became the skeletal structure of a much wider body of schematically linked information which was easily remembered.

In complex campaigns, numerical formulae proliferated as the Party struggled to communicate its message. During the massive Socialist Education Movement, for example, the Party promoted the 'Four Cleanups' (*siqing*) to clean up accounting procedures, granary supplies, accumulation of private property, and abuses of the work points system. Linked to these 'Four Cleanups' there were 'Three Threes', which were the focus of sub-campaigns:

1. Promote the 'Three "Isms"' (*san zhuyi*): collectivism, patriotism, socialism.

2. Oppose the 'Three Bad Styles' (*san zhong huai zuofeng*): the capitalist, the feudal,the extravagant.

3. Implement the 'Three Necessities' (*san bixu*): building socialism, loving the collective, running communes democratically and frugally.

All of these formulae had to be learned by heart and their implications explored, a process aided by their discussion at numerous meetings. To an outsider, they sound daunting, but they were built out of terms familiar to all Chinese and they had implications for people's lives. They were not needless jargon, but an effective way of helping millions of peasants to understand the huge range of issues involved in a campaign whose mission was nothing less than the renewal of socialism throughout rural China. (Cf. Baum & Tiewes 1968; Baum 1975).

Keyword slogans became popular with the advent of the Great Leap Forward in 1958 (Li 1962, 27-37). They 'coded' each part of a longer expression into a single, monosyllabic 'keyword'. Recitation of the slogan had a powerful, staccato effect, and the coding reduced the processing effort involved in communication and interpretation. The slogans were frequently used to urge the people to greater efforts as

they sought to increase production and build socialism. For example, the slogan *duo kuai hao sheng* ('more, faster, better, more economical') was a coded version of Mao's statement that it was necessary 'to work more, work faster, work better, and work more economically to build socialism' (*you duo, yue kuai, yue hao, yue sheng di jianshe shehuizhuyi*).

Keyword slogans were also used to summarize information, with each monosyllabic word serving as a reminder of other things which had been learned. For example, Mao's agricultural policy was summarized and popularized in his famous 'eight-character constitution':

tu, fei, shui, zhong,
mi, bao, guan, gong.

The English translation lacks the poetic rhyme and musical tones of the original:

Earth, fertilizer, water, seeds,
Density, protection, management, tools.

We learned to recite the 'eight-character constitution' in school, and the Chinese peasants were made to learn it too, as a key to policies which were explained to them in detail - policies which Mao learned from the charlatans who helped to ruin Soviet agriculture. The peasants were told, for example, that 'earth' stood for deep ploughing (so deep that it ruined the topsoil); that 'water' stood for irrigation (which often led to salination or the hurried construction of dams which collapsed); and that 'density' referred to 'close planting' (which caused the crops to grow weakly or die). With the aid of the 'eight-character constitution', the peasants learned these policies only too well and the result, we shall see, was mass starvation. (Cf. Becker 1996).

2.4 The Language of Class Analysis

In 1951, only two years after the Communist victory, Professor Ye Chang-qing of the Chinese Catholic University was sent with other intellectuals to the countryside to reform his thought by participating

in the land reform programme. He was astonished to find that the peasants used the following words easily and naturally as part of their everyday conversation (cited Yu 1964, 91-2):

mingjue	to understand clearly
lingdao	to guide (v.), authorities (n.)
douzheng	to struggle
yapo	oppression
mubiao	objective, goal
sixiang	ideology, view, thought
taolun	discussion
ruodian	weakness
jiji	active
zhengce	policy
fengjian shili	feudalistic forces
tongzhi	control, rule (v. or n.)
biaozhun	standard
juewu	consciousness
yanjiu	research
zongjie	conclusion
chedi	thoroughly
renwu	task, assignment
boxue jidu	system of exploitation
bufa	illegal, unlawful
wenti	problem, issue, question
jiancha	investigation
jiaoliu	exchange of ideas or experience
buchong	to supplement
kaizhan	to start, develop
tuanjie	unity, unify
zhengzhi weifeng	political prestige
baopi	accomplice
zhuyao	most important
genju	according to
youdian	advantage
hefa	legal
heli	logical

These terms were part of the technical vocabulary of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, and even the more familiar ones had new connotations. When the list was shown to twelve Chinese professors who had migrated to the United States, they said that only five of the 33 terms would conceivably have been used by male peasants before 1949: *yapo* (oppression), *sixiang* (ideology), *wenti* (problem, issue), *heli* (logical) and *hefa* (legal). In their view, none of

the expressions would have been used by peasant women (Yu 1964, 92).

The list was far from exhaustive. We could easily add to it a host of words and phrases which the new government introduced, popularized or modified in meaning. These have been surveyed in a series of excellent monographs published by the Center for Chinese Studies at Berkeley (Li 1956a, 1956b, 1957a, 1957b, 1958, 1962; Hsia 1961, 1963, 1964). Many are also included in the Center's *Current Chinese Communist Newspaper Terms and Sayings* (1971). I discuss here only those terms most relevant to the themes which I shall develop in later chapters on the Cultural Revolution.

Mao Zedong knew that mastery of the linguistic code of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought was essential if cadres were to communicate effectively with each other and teach people to think in the categories of the new ideology. In March 1949, some six months before the foundation of the People's Republic of China, he expressed his concern:

> In the past some of our high-ranking cadres did not have a common language even on basic theoretical problems of Marxism-Leninism, because they had not studied enough. There is more of a common language in the Party today, but the problem has not yet been fully solved. For instance, in the land reform there is still some difference in the understanding of what is meant by "middle peasants" and "rich peasants". [Mao 1949b, 365-66].

Mao's comment pointed to the necessity for everyone to understand the language of class, for that language was vital to revolutionary transformation; it also underpinned the policies of social manipulation which Mao later used to consolidate his rule.

'Class', in the language of the Chinese Communist Party, had little to do with the traditional Marxist concept of class, or with any other concept of class known to social science. Classes, for Mao, were not necessarily economically constituted groups, let alone groups with different positions in relations of production. Rather, they were groups divided according to the perceived likelihood that they would support or oppose the communist cause. The result was a system of

classification designed to consolidate the Party's rule - a system which affected both political status and chances of success under the new regime. This system assigned each person to one of over sixty categories, known as *chengfen*, based mostly on occupation, wealth and source of income in the three years before 1949, but sometimes on political or criminal records both before and after that date. These classifications were grouped into broader class categories (*jieji chengfen*), which were in turn ranked as 'good', 'middle' and 'bad' on the basis of their presumed orientation towards the revolution. The resulting class labels, which determined people's fates after 1949, can be summarized as follows (cf. White 1976; Kraus 1981; Kuhn 1984; Watson 1984):[2]

1. 'Good' classes (*chengfen hao*):
   (a) 'Revolutionary cadres' (pre-Liberation Party members)
   (b) 'Revolutionary soldiers' (pre-Liberation soldiers)
   (c) 'Revolutionary martyrs' (communists who had died in the revolutionary wars, bequeathing elevated class status to their descendants)
   (d) Industrial workers
   (e) Poor and lower-middle peasants

2. Middle classes (*yiban chengfen*):
   (a) The petty bourgeoisie, store clerks, etc.
   (b) Middle peasants
   (c) Intellectuals - professionals, teachers, clerks, etc.

3. 'Bad' classes (*chengfen buhao)*
   (a) Landlords
   (b) Rich peasants
   (c) Counterrevolutionaries
   (d) 'Bad elements' (common criminals)
   (e) 'Rightists' (a category added to include those who had criticised the Party or its policies during the Hundred Flowers Campaign in 1957).
   (f) Capitalists

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[2]See also the useful discussion in Unger 1982, 12-14, 254, n.1. Unger, however, uses the term *jieji chengfen* where I use the term *chushen* ('class origin' or 'family background'), which I discuss later. The Chinese themselves are often confused and inconsistent in their use of class terminology, and this has caused problems in academic discussions of the class system.

The five 'good' categories were termed collectively *hongwulei* - 'five kinds of red' or 'five reds' - while the landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements and Rightists became known collectively as *heiwulei* - 'five kinds of black' or 'five blacks'.[3]

This system of categorizing people into 'good', 'bad' and 'middle' classes almost turned the pre-revolutionary Chinese hierarchy on its head. Right at the top were the revolutionary cadres, soldiers and martyrs who had been branded as 'bandits' by the Guomindang during the civil war. Second only to them were the workers and 'poor and lower-middle peasants' who had been at or near the bottom of the traditional hierarchy. The intellectuals, formerly revered and traditionally associated with administrative power, were regarded as ideologically suspect and placed in the middle classes where they were watched carefully. Those classed as capitalists, although given credit as a 'national' bourgeoisie opposed to imperialism, were disliked, mistrusted and subjected to disabilities as one-time exploiters. And dispossessed landlords and rich peasants, the former élite of rural society, were ostracised and subjected to abuse along with 'bad elements' and 'counterrevolutionaries' at the very bottom of the hierarchy. The social pyramid had been almost perfectly inverted.

In the creation of this inverted hierarchy, the new language of revolution was not merely reflective and passive - words were not simply invented and adapted to describe a new social reality imposed by force. Rather, people were manipulated into speaking in ways which helped to bring the inverted hierarchy into existence and which helped to sustain it in the years to come. This was a matter of deliberate policy, adopted precisely in order to bring about a revolution in attitudes - to ensure that the old hierarchy did not live on in peoples' hearts. Mao and the Communist Party could simply have used cadres

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[3]'Bureaucratic capitalists' who actively opposed the revolution fled as the communists advanced before 1949. Other capitalists were regarded as a 'national bourgeoisie' not under the control of imperialism, and the Communist Party sought to entice them into a 'united front' against the Japanese and the Guomindang before 1949. As a result, they were officially seen as 'better' than other members of the 'bad' classes, and avoided formal inclusion in the 'black categories'. They were, however, 'exploiters' who within a few years were expropriated, and they remained objects of suspicion, discrimination and condemnation.

and soldiers to dispossess the landlords, rich peasants and capitalists, as the Bolsheviks had done in the Soviet Union. Instead, they mobilized the workers and the poor and lower-middle peasants to deliver judgment on their erstwhile oppressors. They did this to make the 'revolutionary masses' *participate* in their own liberation and take *responsibility* for the fate of those whom they condemned.

In the case of land reform, for example, Party cadres sought out people with grievances - the landless, the indebted, women, the frustrated young, or anyone wronged by a landlord or a clan leader. Their aim was to persuade these people that they had suffered at the hands of a ruling class, then get them to expose the crimes of their oppressors at public 'struggle meetings'. At these meetings, the accused were paraded helplessly in front of the villagers as their accusers 'spoke bitterness' against them, demanding redress and punishment. They were threatened, made to hang their heads, and faced with demands that they confess their wrongdoing and repent. The litany of real and alleged crimes was usually enough to persuade most who were present to join the chanting of slogans condemning the accused and calling for punishment. The whole process was intended to unmask the landlords as class oppressors and to secure their humiliation and condemnation through 'class struggle' at the hands of the villagers whom they had once dominated. It was only when this had been achieved that the redistribution of land took place. (For accounts of land reform, see Whyte 1974, 136-9; Vogel 1969, ch. 3; Crook & Crook 1959; Hinton 1966; Yang 1959).

The crucial thing to note about this process of 'class struggle' is that for most villagers it involved little more than *oral* participation. The struggle was underpinned by the Communist Party's power, but 'speaking bitterness', shouting slogans, uttering threats and demanding punishment were symbolically vital, politically crucial and powerfully persuasive. Symbolically, they promoted the useful myth of the 'mass line' - Mao's doctrine that the Party's leadership involved taking the 'scattered and unsystematic' ideas of the masses, refining them through study, then going back to the people and explaining the new ideas 'until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and concentrate them into action' (Mao 1943, 290). Politically, the oral theatre of class struggle humiliated the village élite, establishing the

inferiority of the landlords and their associates to those whom they had exploited. In terms of persuasion, the condemnations transformed the outlook of many poor and lower middle peasants. The most powerful mechanism of attitude change stemmed from the fact that the majority of villagers had been manipulated into taking, more or less voluntarily, a revolutionary action: they had accused and reviled leaders whom they had previously respected and obeyed, endorsing their dispossession and punishment. Collectively, they had implicated themselves in the execution of perhaps a million members of landlord families (Spence 1990, 517), and in the terror and protracted suffering of millions more. Having legitimized all this, they were powerless to reverse it. They had to believe that their actions were justified or suffer the burden of dissonance. Words had made them revolutionaries, and words made them eager students as the cadres explained the new revolutionary doctrines which rationalized what they had done.

The same pattern occurred in the 'Five-Anti' (*wufan*) campaign of late 1951 and 1952, which subordinated the surviving capitalists to Communist Party dictates as a preliminary to their total dispossession. The 'Antis' which the campaign targeted were bribery, tax evasion, theft of state property, cheating on government contracts and stealing state economic information for speculative purposes. Such practices had been common under the Guomindang, and they continued after 1949 as capitalists sought to buy 'protection' from cadres and survive in the new environment of state control. The campaign involved the investigation of over 450,000 businesses in China's five largest cities, and it resulted in the execution of about 500 members of the bourgeoisie, the suicide of another 2,000, the imprisonment of 34,000 and the imposition of heavy fines on many more (Schurmann 1968, 318; Dittmer 1987, 47). During the campaign, work teams were sent into factories and offices to persuade the workers to 'speak bitterness' against their employers and managers, accusing them of unfair treatment, corruption and graft. The accusations then justified the work teams in having the owners and managers dragged before denunciation meetings to be attacked and humiliated by their own workers, forced to confess their crimes and beg the revolutionary masses for forgiveness (cf. Gardner 1969). Symbolically, this affirmed the leading role of the workers even in capitalist enterprises; politically, it established the dominance of the Communist Party over

the workers and over the way in which firms conducted their business; and ideologically, it contributed to the transformation of workers' attitudes. In particular, it shattered the emotional ties which often connected workers, managers and employers, especially in smaller firms. Workers had been manipulated into verbal behaviour which was psychologically inconsistent with their existing values - behaviour whose consequences could never be undone. The resulting dissonance could be reduced, however, if the workers accepted the new Marxist ideology, for that ideology attacked their emotional ties to employers as false consciousness and it justified their accusations as revolutionary acts. Many workers therefore had a powerful motive for ideological conversion.

The same pattern of modifying attitudes by manipulating people into making damaging criticisms of others was followed in other major campaigns which targeted particular groups. During the Suppression of Counterrevolutionaries Campaign in 1950-51, for example, committees were set up in neighbourhoods all over China to flush out spies, and people were urged to inform on friends, family and neighbours who had been associated with the Guomindang or had opposed the Communists. This again was merely the prelude to 'struggle' meetings at which accusers bore witness against their erstwhile associates as the audience chanted slogans and demanded confession, penitence and punishment. Almost the entire country had been induced to enter into a discourse in which there was only one loyalty - to the Communist Party and its revolution. It was a discourse which served to justify the fate of those whom it condemned: seven to eight hundred thousand 'counterrevolutionaries' were executed and millions more imprisoned (Dittmer 1987, 47). So words were weapons of terror with which the 'revolutionary masses' consigned their victims to death or misery. Kindly people who had been manipulated into demanding punishment could easily experience extreme dissonance which they could reduce by convincing themselves that counterrevolutionaries deserved their fate. Once they came to believe that, they were committed to the revolution.

Not all the campaigns were directed at members of the 'bad' classes. Party leaders, for example, mobilized the population against lower level corruption, malpractice or ideological backsliding in the Three-Anti Campaign of late 1951-52 and the Socialist Education

Movement of 1962-65. This preserved the fiction of the 'mass line', whereby the Party was supposed to learn from the masses. Even more important, centrally controlled mobilization of the revolutionary masses was a weapon which the Party leaders used to discipline the local cadres and rectify their ideology. This was crucial, because it was the local cadres who made sure that ordinary people participated in the centrally directed discourse through which they were manipulated.

It was the desire to preserve the purity of the discourse, too, which explains the almost constant harassment of intellectuals under Mao's rule. In 1950 and 1951, huge numbers of intellectuals were subjected to intensive 'thought reform' courses lasting six months or so. They studied Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao, they were lectured on the revolution by veteran cadres, they engaged in criticism and self-criticism in small groups, and they wrote 'autobiographies' in which they criticised their pre-revolutionary attitudes and actions, attributing them to their own selfishness, their sheltered existence, and the failings of their teachers and parents. As Jonathon Spence (1990, 564) has noted, 'This last requirement caused profound crises for many who had been brought up believing in the strict tenets of filial piety as derived from the Confucian tradition, and in general the entire process subjected the intellectuals to severe mental stress.'

Mental stress caused by conflict between old attitudes and new verbal professions is, of course, dissonance, and it can be removed by abandoning the old attitudes. In some cases, this is precisely what happened. According to Robert Jay Lifton (1961, 400-401), a minority of those subjected to this type of re-education became *zealous converts.* Most of these were very young - in their late teens or twenties - and they were seldom 'higher intellectuals'. Rather, most were intellectuals only in the extended Chinese sense which includes all people with an education - even high school graduates. Their attitudes were relatively unformed, and they were eager to identify with the new regime which held the key to their future advancement. Another relatively small group consisted of *resisters.* They regarded thought reform as 'suffocating' 'bad' and 'coercive', and they 'were apt to have been a good deal more sympathetic to Communism before their reform than after.' They had engaged in self-criticism purely to satisfy their 're-educators' and colleagues, so they were able to neutralize dissonance

by telling themselves that their new professions were purely a response to pressure. The third and largest group became what Lifton terms *adapters*: they now knew what they were expected to say and believe, they had a better understanding of the new doctrines, and they were often more sympathetic to them. However, they did not become passionately committed to the new ideology and they were relieved to escape 're-education' and return to normal life.

The failure of 'thought reform' to produce genuine enthusiasm for revolutionary ideology amongst established '*higher* intellectuals' has a number of explanations, but two stand out. First, in nearly all cases, the self-criticisms and counter-attitudinal statements were made under heavy pressure. It was therefore very easy for the intellectuals to reduce dissonance by telling themselves 'I am only doing this because I am being made to.' Second, although they were made to participate in revolutionary discourse, that discourse was usually undermined because of countervailing evidence from other sources. Those who had studied overseas could not accept everything they were told about the capitalist West; those who came from landlord, capitalist, intellectual or Guomindang families knew that the 'correct' version of their parents was an inaccurate stereotype; experts in literature could easily pick holes in the crude analysis of Mao's *Yan'an Talks on Literature and Art*; historians knew that workers and peasants were not always the moving force in history; and above all, higher intellectuals of all varieties were trained to appreciate evidence and argument, not dogmatic assertions from cadres less educated than themselves. In short, the Party was quite right to mistrust 'higher intellectuals': they might be sympathetic in general terms to the revolution, but their existing knowledge and habits of mind made most of them incapable of accepting the simplistic view of the world expressed by the revolutionary discourse of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. (Cf. Vogel 1969, 196-7; and Wu 1993, for a personal account).

The Party knew that many higher intellectuals remained unreformed, so it was soon mobilizing university teachers and students to condemn colleagues who had dubious pasts or who dissented even mildly from current Party orthodoxy (Wu 1993, 17-23, 28-30,). This process reached a peak in 1955 after the veteran Marxist literary theorist and critic Hu Feng called for greater intellectual freedom. The

official reaction was swift: he was forced to confess his ideological crimes, his confession was rejected, he was denounced by fellow intellectuals at public meetings and small group study sessions, and there was a witch-hunt for 'Hu Feng elements' throughout the country. Soon the hysteria developed into a nationwide Campaign to Uproot Hidden Counterrevolutionaries during which 81,000 intellectuals were 'unmasked and punished' and over 300,000 lost their civil rights because of their 'political unreliability' (Dittmer 1987, 47-8; Wu 1993, 34-46).

The biggest disaster to befall China's intellectuals before the Cultural Revolution, however, was the Hundred Flowers Campaign and its tragic sequel, the great Anti-Rightist Campaign. From May 1956 Mao called, with increasing vigour, for intellectuals to speak more freely. He asked them to criticize cadres and the Party constructively under the slogan 'Let a hundred flowers bloom together; let a hundred schools of thought contend.' Finally, in May 1957 some intellectuals began to take him at his word, and there followed a torrent of criticism of the Party's policies, personnel and methods. Many called for greater intellectual freedom, and a few even called for democracy. Mao and other leaders were shocked at the response and crushed their critics with the Anti-Rightist Campaign. 'The result', according to Fairbank and Reischauer, 'was to stigmatize and put out of action one-half to three-quarters of a million of China's educated elite' (1989, 496). The labour camps swelled with intellectuals, who worked to exhaustion, studied Mao's Thought, engaged in criticism and self-criticism, said all the right things, and all too often starved to death in the terrible famine which soon followed (Wu 1994, 73-175; Becker 1996, ch. 12).

The Anti-Rightist Campaign employed the usual methods of popular mobilization, in which students and intellectuals were encouraged to prove their revolutionary fervour by informing on their teachers and colleagues, then condemning them at denunciation meetings. During the campaign the press, taking its cue from Mao, introduced a language of denunciation which matched the Party's claim that the Rightists, unlike most earlier class enemies, had operated in secret as they plotted the destruction of socialism. So they were identified with the colour black, a traditional metaphor for evil involving treachery or deception. They were accused of hiding their

evil natures with 'painted skin' (*hua pi*), described as evil spirits who disguised themselves as humans, and likened to savage animals, especially wolves (Li 1958, 53-79). This language of vilification was greatly enriched and far more common during the Cultural Revolution, and I will discuss it extensively in chapter 5. At this point, it is sufficient to note that in both periods it was used to dehumanize class enemies.

What of the people who were repeatedly condemned? Did criticism, self-criticism and saying all the right things reform the Rightists, counterrevolutionaries, landlords, capitalists, rich peasants and bad elements? There is little evidence that it did. Indeed, as Robert J. Lifton (1961, 412) has argued, 'thought reform is subject to a law of diminishing conversions. Repeated attempts to reform the same man are more likely to increase his hostility ... than to purge him of his "incorrect" thoughts. With each histrionic show of repentance, his conversion becomes more suspect.' This generalization is supported by the testimony of those sentenced to labour reform and labour re-education camps. In these institutions, the inmates were compelled as far as possible to live within the new, revolutionary discourse, saying 'correct' things in the 'correct' language, engaging in criticism and self-criticism, and studying revolutionary writings. It seems rarely to have worked. Extensive interviews with former inmates led Martin King Whyte to conclude that forced re-education resulted in 'negligible or negative attitude changes.' (Whyte 1974, 226-7). His conclusion is confirmed by the memoirs of former inmates like Wu Ningkun (1993), Harry Wu (Wu & Wakeman 1994), Zhang Xianliang (1994) and Pu Ning (1994), and by the torrent of demands for redress by former Rightists which followed Mao's death. I myself have never heard of anyone whose attitudes changed in the intended direction as a result of forced re-education, but I do know of people who were permanently embittered.[4]

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[4]Some reports indicate that political prisoners subjected to 'thought reform' in the early 1950s gave more appearance of sincerity in their self-criticisms than their counterparts in later years. This was no doubt partly because political prisoners in the early years were not given fixed sentences, but released when they showed evidence of reform. Moreover, in in the early 1950s many still naïvely believed that if they convinced the Party that they really *had* reformed they would have a promising future in the 'New China'. What we lack is any convinving evidence that their self-criticisms were sincere. See the discussion in Whyte 1974, 193-4, 208-9.

The new discourse introduced by linguistic engineering did not convert everyone, but no one could remain untouched by it. This was particularly true of the language of class and class struggle, which affected even those who were born after 1949. The reason for this is that Mao kept class struggle alive by creating what amounted to a hereditary class system. Younger Chinese not only had a *chengfen* describing their own current role in society ('student', 'poor peasant', and so on), but a 'class of origin' or 'family background' (*chushen* or sometimes *jiating chengfen*) inherited from their fathers. Young males would in turn pass this class status on to their children. My father, for example, who was given the *chengfen* of 'student' in 1949 because he had not entered the workforce, inherited the *chushen* of 'poor peasant' (*pinnong*) from my grandfather, a landless rural labourer, and he passed this 'class of origin' on to me. We were both lucky, for people of 'red' class origin were assumed to be revolutionary, while those who were of 'bad' class origin were politically suspect. My father became an academic, and his *chushen* gave him a political security which his predominantly middle class and bad class colleagues lacked. For my part, I was always grateful that my 'good' class background meant that doors were not closed to me. At the same time, I knew that my mother's class origin somewhat blemished my 'red' credentials: she had inherited the *chushen* of 'landlord' (*dizhu*) from her father, my paternal grandfather's employer. I was also aware that while my official classification as a 'poor peasant' by origin gave me some political safety, it conferred little prestige, despite the 'leading role' which the workers and peasants were supposed to have in Mao's China. The children of 'revolutionary soldiers' ranked well above me, and the children of 'revolutionary cadres' were the true élite, envied by us all.

This hereditary class system influenced everyone's behaviour. In Chen village, for example, former landlords and rich peasants were at the bottom of the status ladder, they were banned from political activities, they were shunned socially, and they were dragged out periodically for 'class struggle' in accordance with the slogan 'Never forget class bitterness!' (Chan, Madsen & Unger 1984, 16, 47, 69; Unger 1984). Children of the 'bad elements' were not regarded as class

enemies and were therefore allowed to participate in political activities, but because of their *chushen* they had little chance of political advancement and other children hesitated to associate with them.

In urban areas, the social isolation of bad-class children could be less severe. In my school, in a university village where many students had undesirable backgrounds, academically oriented children of 'good' origins frequently made friends with similar children of 'bad' origins. However, in the school's numerous and prestigious political activities, bad-class students were severely disadvantaged, and such students had to adjust to some harsh realities. In periods when a strong class line was applied, political criteria often excluded them from further education (cf. Unger 1982; Lee 1978, 78-84); they had to watch less able people of 'good' origins get most of the desirable jobs; and their class backgrounds made them far less desirable as marriage partners, especially in the case of males who would transmit their *chushen* to their children (cf. Croll, 1981, 1984; Unger 1984). They also faced constant reminders of the crimes of their parents and grandparents.

The new language of class and class struggle which the Communist Party introduced after 1949 at first promoted revolutionary transformation, but by the late 1950s its continued repetition was being used to keep old conflicts alive in people's hearts. It directed struggle against classes which no longer had any existence outside the discourse of class and class struggle. It fossilized attitudes, and it created the impression that the enemies of revolution were still a threat. This was very useful to a Party which could blame 'class enemies' for 'sabotage' every time its policies did not work, and which could claim that they were behind every protest. It was also, we shall see, very useful to Mao himself, who was able to identify his alleged opponents in the Party with class enemies from bygone days who were planning a comeback. A fictive discourse is a powerful weapon if people can be persuaded of the fictions. And, as the following chapters show, many people were, for a time, convinced. Command of the discourse of class struggle, we shall see, was vital to Mao's success in launching the Cultural Revolution.

2.5 Language, Love and Revolution

The techniques of linguistic engineering discussed in the last section shattered the allegiance of large sections of the population to the traditional social order. In particular, they made large sections of the population active participants in the downfall of the landlords, the urban bourgeoisie and 'counterrevolutionary' elements associated with the Guomindang. They shattered traditional bonds of deference, and by setting rich and poor members of the same clan against each other, they helped to make class, rather than lineage, the focus of poor people's loyalty (cf. Whyte 1974, 137). Class loyalty, in turn, was supposed to be inseparable from loyalty to the Communist Party, to Chairman Mao and to the revolutionary cause.

This transference of loyalties was promoted also by social engineering. In the cities, the Party-controlled work units (*danwei*) assumed many of the functions of the clan and of the extended family, while in rural areas Party-controlled production teams and brigades created new vested interests and sources of solidarity (Chan, Madsen & Unger 1984, 31-5; Whyte 1979). As always, though, social engineering was complemented by linguistic engineering, as people were pressured and manipulated into talking in ways intended to shift the focus of their loyalties.

Language had to reflect ideal revolutionary social relationships. So the terms *xiansheng* ('Mr') and *taitai* ('Mrs'), which had been used as forms of address amongst the respectable classes in the old society, were displaced by *tongzhi* ('comrade') in contexts where a title was appropriate. The new term, which meant literally 'common will', was applied to everyone except class enemies. In China before 1949, as in Taiwan to this day, a husband referred to his wife as *wo* ('my') *taitai,* and a wife to her husband as *wo xiansheng.* In Mao's China, however, the standard term for a husband or a wife became *airen*, which means, literally, 'love person'. This term had previously been used to refer to a lover, and its introduction in place of the obsolete *xiansheng* and *taitai* reflected the Communist Party's insistence that people must marry freely and for love, rather than having their marriages arranged to suit family interests. The term *ai* ('love'), however, when applied to true

love between revolutionaries, signified something quite different from 'bourgeois' or romantic love. Elizabeth Croll (1984, 177) quotes a 1964 booklet of advice to husbands and wives:

> In a socialist society love between a husband and wife is built on common political thinking and on the foundation of struggling together for the revolutionary cause. The relationship between husband and wife is first of all comradeship and the feelings between them are revolutionary. By revolutionary is meant that politically he should take her as a new comrade-in-arms, in production as well as in work, he should take her as a class sister and labour together, at home he should regard her as a life companion, besides that a couple should respect and love each other, help each other, and encourage each other so as to achieve progress together.

In accordance with this, young people were supposed to assess the revolutionary commitment of prospective marriage partners. Indeed, in the early 1950s, and still in some areas in the mid-1950's, there were frequently rules preventing people of 'good' class origin from marrying the 'former exploiting classes' (Croll 1984, 180).

If revolutionary 'love' was supposed to be the basis of the relationship of husband and wife, it was also supposed to characterize other relationships within socialist society. Everyone was supposed to feel 'hot love' (*re ai*) for the Party and Chairman Mao, and to make sure that people knew what this meant the Party in 1958 launched a movement urging people to 'hand over their hearts to the Party' (*xiang dang jiao xin*). They were to do this by purifying their ideology and dedicating themselves to the revolution (Li 1962, 31-32). In the spirit of revolutionary love, cadres were asked to *jiao zhixin pengyou* ('establish intimate relationships') with the labouring masses; they were told that they could turn for advice to comrades who were *zhixin pengyou* ('friends who know each other's hearts'); and, of course, cadres were officially loved by the peasants, who were supposed to use the language of popular love songs to call them *zhixin ren* ('the person who understands my heart') (Hsia 1963, 40). These ways of speaking expressed an ideal, and it was hoped that if people used them the ideal might become reality. They were also a useful means of disguising reality at a time when the cadres were enforcing policies which caused mass starvation.

If the language of love was appropriated and redefined by the Party, so was the language of family relationships. Traditional family loyalty was like traditional romantic love: it was an impediment to total revolutionary commitment. The Chinese emphasis on filial duty made family loyalty a dangerous rival to a Party which pressured children to denounce parents who were class enemies or guilty of serious political errors. In response, the Party devised strategies designed to redirect family loyalties towards itself, the revolutionary masses and the revolutionary cause. One way of doing this was to supply many of the services formerly provided by the family and the clan. Another way was to extend the language of family relationships to the relationship between individuals and their revolutionary comrades, so that love of family was submerged in a greater love.

Traditionally, the term *qin ren* ('relatives') was used only in its literal sense, applying strictly to blood relatives. After 1949, however, the Party-controlled media popularized figurative uses of the term, so that the revolutionary masses as a whole became one's *qin ren.* Similarly, the term *xiongdi* ('brother', 'brothers') was now applied figuratively to all comrades and added as a prefix or a suffix to words denoting any groups which belonged to the revolutionary family: *xiongdi xuexiao* ('fraternal schools'), *nongmin xiongdi* ('peasant brothers'), and *xiongdi guojia* ('fraternal nations' - i.e. socialist ones). Young people all became *hao ernü* ('good sons and daughters') of the Communist Party and Chairman Mao, and children called members of the People's Liberation Army their *jiefangjun shushu* ('uncles') (cf. Li 1957a, 17-22).

The extension of the language of love and kinship to the Party, the masses and the revolutionary peoples of the world was intended to promote the transfer of emotional attachments to revolutionary objects. It probably succeeded to some extent. If nothing else, higher order conditioning would have tended to make revolutionary objects more attractive through their association with positively evaluated words. At the same time, we should note that this tendency towards more positive evaluation had to compete with opposing tendencies, like that produced by the Party's role in causing mass starvation during the Great Leap Forward. In that case, the repeated application of positively

evaluated terms to the Party may in many cases have done no more than soften a catastrophic decline in its popularity. It may even have made some people hate the Party more because they objected to enforced professions of love for cadres who had been responsible for so many deaths. I shall say more on this in the final section of the chapter.

We should also remember that when the language of love and kinship was applied to revolutionary subject matter, it did not evoke the same emotions as it did in other contexts. Chinese of my generation learned to say, without embarrassment, and even without emotion, that we loved Chairman Mao and the Party. What we still could not do was say *'wo ai ni'* ('I love you') to those whom we loved romantically: the words were simply too emotionally charged. We showed our love by looks, gestures, deeds and allusive words, but we could not express it directly. So there were, after years of linguistic engineering, still two kinds of love, the romantic and the revolutionary. We used the word *ai* for both loves, but that simply shows that the word had acquired two meanings: its traditional, sacred meaning, which remained intact because we needed it to designate the emotion which we felt; and its new, revolutionary meaning, which we needed to express the very different emotion which we felt - or pretended to feel - for the Party and our hundreds of millions of revolutionary comrades. No doubt there was interaction of meanings, with romantic love adding connotations to revolutionary love and *vice versa*, but interaction is not identity and the two meanings remained separate.

2.6 The Discourse of Collectivization

The language of love acquired some currency in the countryside, because most peasants were easily won to the broad thrust of early 1950s Maoist discourse. The land reform of 1950-52 suited their economic interests; the techniques of popular mobilization implicated them in revolutionary discourse and caused dissonance which encouraged them to accept its message; and the new discourse elevated the status of the 'poor and lower-middle peasants' by inverting the social pyramid and describing them as a leading class, along with the workers and revolutionary cadres. Most important of all, the discourse

as yet said almost nothing about the Party's plans for confiscating the peasants' individual holdings, replacing them with vast, Soviet-style collective farms ruled by cadres.

In 1955, however, Mao insisted that the Party force the peasants to join relatively small cooperatives of 30 to 50 households, then in 1956 he decreed that they should join 'higher stage cooperatives' or 'collectives' of 200 to 300 households. They were to pool their resources and farm nearly all the land collectively under the direction of cadres, leaving no more than 5 percent of the land as private plots under family control. Maoist discourse now identified a new target: 'individual peasants' (*geti nongmin*), 'do it alone peasants' (*dangan nongmin*) and 'do it alone households' (*dangan hu*) - in other words, all those who stood outside the cooperatives (Li 1957a, 29-32). The discourse described the cooperatives as 'advanced' (*xianjin*) and it condemned individual peasants as 'backward' (*luohou*), 'selfish' (*zisi*) and 'capitalistic' (*zibenzhuyi de*). The poorest members of rural society often initially saw advantages in the pooling of resources, but many peasants - including my paternal grandparents - were reluctant to hand over land which they had been given only a few years before. As a result, many had to be forced to join, and many slaughtered their draught animals and sold the meat rather than surrender them. The formation of cooperatives was followed by widespread defiance of the Party and a reversion to family farming. Indeed, although by the end of 1956 about 96 percent of peasants nominally belonged to cooperatives, some 20 percent had formally withdrawn from collective farming. Most of the remaining peasants put as little effort as possible into collective labour, saving their energy and night soil for the tiny private plots from which they produced as much as 20-30 percent of all farm income. At the same time, grain yields from the collective farms plummeted and there was widespread famine. (On collectivization, see Friedmann, Pickowicz & Selden 1991, chs 7-8; Becker 1996, ch. 4; Zhou 1996, 46-48; Spence 1990, 549-51).

The Party used the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957 to purge doubters within its ranks and to suppress what Mao described as 'the counterrevolutionary activities of landlords and rich peasants' - a standard formula used to misrepresent the broadly based opposition to collectivization (cf. Friedmann, Pickowicz & Selden 1991, 209). This

political movement paved the way for the elimination of private plots and the emergence of Party-controlled 'people's communes' - gigantic amalgamations embracing an average of 4,600 households (calculated from Spence 1991, 579). The collectivist discourse which was applied to the commune was summed up in a song taught to the peasants in Raoyang County, Hebei Province:

> Communism is heaven.
> The commune is the ladder.
> If we build that ladder,
> We can climb the heights.
> [Friedmann, Pickowicz & Selden 1991].[5]

The reality was that agriculture was now at the mercy of commune-level cadres who were ignorant or neglectful of the realities of farming, but who were determined to preserve their own positions by obeying the Maoist ideologues at the top. Mao, the chief ideologue, was determined to maintain the discourse of collectivism at any cost. One 'cost' was much of the good will of the peasants, who overwhelmingly resented the loss of their land and of the power to make decisions about crops and agricultural techniques. They now took orders on agricultural matters from the cadres. The result was the tragedy of the Great Leap Forward - a tragedy which destroyed the remaining credibility of collectivist discourse in most of rural China.

2.7 Discourse of the Great Leap Forward: From Martial Language to Disillusionment

The discourse of collectivization was accompanied by the popularization of a vast array of military terms amongst all sections of the population. This militarization of language is not surprising. After its break with the Guomindang in 1927 the Communist Party, savaged and pursued, was forced to become a Party-Army. Its leaders, including Mao, were involved for over two decades in the wars with the Guomindang and the Japanese. Their military experience left a deep impression on them, and it combined with Leninist and Stalinist influences to suggest models of mobilization and social control which

[5] I learned a very similar song at school in Tianjin.

they applied to the wider society. It is not surprising that the terminology which they used to describe those models drew heavily upon the language of military organization and the language of war. Moreover, after 1949, when they achieved power over China as a whole, they applied a remarkable range of military metaphors to the business of everyday life. The Chinese language had been notably lacking in such metaphors, for the country had been ruled by scholar-bureaucrats, not the warrior aristocracies who for so long dominated Europe. Mao's soldier-ideologues, however, made the language of everyday life probably the most militarized in the modern world.

At no time before the Cultural Revolution was military language more all-pervasive than during the Great Leap Forward of 1958-61, which was supposed to make China rich and lay the foundations for a rapid transition to the paradise of communism. Consider the following metaphors, ably catalogued and explained by T.H. Hsia (1961), which were applied routinely to the tasks of production:

1. *Zhanshi* (a fighter)
   [a production worker]

2. *Zhandou* (to fight a battle)
   [to work hard in production]

3. *Zhanxian* (a battle-line)
   [a workplace]

4. *Gangwei* (a sentry post)
   [a revolutionary's appointed position in society]

5. *Da jun* (a great army)
   [a large group of people organized for some project of socialist construction]

6. *Qian jun wan ma* (a great host of mounted and foot soldiers)
   [a huge number of people engaged in production]

7. *Duitian xuanzhan* (to declare war against heaven)
   [to overcome the obstacles which nature poses to production]

8. *Zhangwuo diqing* (to get hold of information about the enemy)
[to secure information relevant to production, as when subjecting iron or to chemical analysis before smelting]

9. *Jinjun* (to stage a march)
[to advance towards a specified goal]

10. *Xiaoxing yundongzhan* (small-scale, mobile warfare)
[work which can be done bit by bit, as time allows]

11. *Tuji* (to attack by storm)
[to make a concerted effort in production]

12. *Da zhanyi* (a major battle)
[a major productive undertaking]

13. *Qianmiezhan* (a battle of annihilation)
[an important productive undertaking assured of complete success]

Such terminology was used, for example, in the great 'battle of annihilation' to exterminate China's sparrows. In Beijing, according to the *People's Daily*, the battle was fought by 'three million brave warriors with a single heart.' Led by President Liu Shaoqi, they formed shock brigades (*tujidui*), mobile units (*jidongdui*), scattering and chasing units (*honggandui*), slingshot units (*dangongdui*), noise-making units (*yinxiangdui*) and searching and capturing units (*soupudui*). 'Everywhere defence was set up, at every pace was a sentinel mounted.' (Hsia 1961, 12-13, quoting *People's Daily* 24 April 1958). With so much heroism and such formidable military organization, the sparrows did not stand a chance. The unintended result was plagues of insects which the sparrows would once have eaten. These, it is said, did more damage to crops than the sparrows had ever done.

Mao was always anxious to enlist the past in the service of the present, so the Party-controlled press resurrected legendary Chinese heroes to flatter the worker and peasant heroes of modern times. An exceptionally strong and fast worker could be called a Wu Song after a fictional hero renowned for his physical prowess; a hard-working old man could be referred to as a Huang Zhong after a famous old warrior of the Three Kingdoms period; a hard-working woman could become a Mu Gui-ying, recalling a mythical woman general of the Song dynasty;

the heroism of women workers could be celebrated by organizing them into 'Mu Guiying shock teams'; workers and peasants with knowledge and intelligence were identified with the legendary general, prime minister and royal adviser Zhuge Liang, and when they gathered together to advise cadres, they did so at a 'Conference of the Zhuge Liangs' (*Zhugeliang hui*).

The military metaphors were matched by a degree of actual military organization of society, for which there was of course appropriate military terminology. During the Great Leap Forward, 220 million people were said to have been organized into a people's militia, 30 million of them armed (Spence 1991, 581). Peasants marched to the fields behind red flags and took their weapons with them. They lived and worked in communes which 'were run as militarized units intended to be effective both in war and peace.' (Becker 1996, 144-5, plate). Above the communes there towered a chain of command centred in Beijing; below them were brigades (*lü*), then production teams whose workers were organized into companies (*lian*), platoons (*pai*), squads (*ban*) and other units with military styles (Spence 1991, 580; Hsia 1961, 25; Becker 1996, 108-9).

This military organization and military language was intended to have two quite specific effects. It was supposed to teach individuals to show soldierly initiative in finding new ways to carry out commands from above, but to subordinate themselves utterly to the leaders who issued those commands; and it was supposed to transfer the urgency, the discipline and the heroism of wartime struggles to the task of building socialism in a time of peace. The attempt to use language to achieve these effects was soundly based, particularly in the case of the second. Higher order conditioning can certainly achieve emotional transference from the language of war to the activities of peace time, and there is some evidence that early in the Great Leap Forward it did exactly that. Encouraged by the militaristic and triumphalist rhetoric, a lot of people were at first willing to gamble that the Party was right in claiming that with one herculean effort China could overcome millennia of poverty. Their spirits buoyed by a splendid diet - they had been encouraged to eat all their reserves of food in the expectation of record crops - they often worked long hours out of enthusiasm as well as

compulsion (Chan, Madsen & Unger 1984, 124-5; Chang 1992, 294-96; Friedmann, Pickowicz & Selden 1991, 218-9, 227, 232).

As the Great Leap Forward developed, however, the peasants learned that they were being given orders originating from people who in agricultural matters were simple idiots, and no amount of conditioning could convince them otherwise. At Chen village, for example, the peasants refused to plant the next year's crops because they were compelled to use techniques which did not work, and because they knew that if they produced anything it would be taken from them. They preferred to scavenge from nearby hillsides or reduce their need for food by doing as little as possible (Chan, Madsen & Unger 1984, 25-6). All over China starving peasants came to loathe cadres who continued to enforce unworkable policies, who confiscated grain then left people to die, and who brutally punished anyone who protested (Becker 1996). The only cadres who retained the peasants' respect were those who suffered with them and, to the best of their ability, helped them to avoid the worst consequences of the policies handed down from above. There were many such cadres at the local level, but they were powerless to change the policies. Armed rebellions erupted in five provinces and had to be put down by the PLA; law and order broke down in some regions; cannibalism occurred in the worst affected areas; black markets started to flourish; lineage organizations re-emerged to provide necessities; the authority and morale of local cadres crumbled; and when work teams arrived to 'rectify' the cadres, they found the peasants angry and dissatisfied (Teiwes 1993, ch. 10; Becker 1996; Friedman, Pickowicz & Selden 1991, chs 9-10; Chang 1992, 291-317, 555-7; Chen 1969; Lewis 1963, 235-38; Ahn 1973; Whyte 1974, 144-5; Vogel 1969, 255-6).

People are easily enough persuaded by a discourse when it is consistent with their hopes and with what they know. However, a discourse which is massively contradicted by accumulated experience begins to look misdirected at best, ludicrous at worst. By 1959, the discourse of martial enthusiasm which had inspired the Great Leap Forward had begun to look ludicrous - at least to people in the countryside. The peasants in a particular province may, or may not, have believed the propaganda about record harvests in other provinces; but they knew that *they* were starving and that the Party

was only making their personal situation worse. In many rural areas, people were beginning to die, and in the next three years the deaths multiplied. In all, perhaps 30 million perished as a result of the famine (Becker 1996). The Party retained control of the rhetoric of public life, but it subjected rural China to a trauma which destroyed its credibility. A culture of resistance emerged, in which people spoke privately a language which expressed the realities of their lives, rather than the fictions of official discourse. In Hubei Province, a peasant jingle mocked the ignorance of cadres who pretended they knew better than the farmers:

> Cadres are subjective pigs;
> Wanting to change the way of farming.
> For the sake of good appearances,
> they would impose cotton growing on bad land.
> [Quoted in Zhou 1996, 48].

Friedman, Pickowicz & Selden (1991, 240, 241, 248, 253, 263) have collected some of the sayings and ditties which expressed the cynicism of peasants in Hebei province. One expressed resentment at the way in which commune officials arrived at harvest time to make the villagers repay credit and fulfil quotas:

> First round: return loans.
> Second round: deliver state grain.
> Commune members share the leftovers.

Another justified stealing:

> Lower rations,
> Squash and greens instead of grain,
> Who doesn't steal gets what he deserves.

A third satirized the power of officials whom all had to please:

> Higher-ups let out a fart, underlings try to look smart;
> Leaders move their lips, commune members run off their hips.

A fourth expressed resentment at those who played the game best:

> Flatter shamelessly: eat delicacies and drink hot stuff.
> Don't flatter: starve to death for sure.

And a fifth condemned the communes:

> [T]he commune is not as good as the co-op and the co-op was not as good as going it alone.

In the cities, the Party fared better. People there received priority in grain supplies, and while hunger and malnutrition were widespread, actual deaths were relatively uncommon. Moreover, the Party's control of the media ensured that most people remained unaware of the scale of the disaster in the countryside. When eventually it was admitted that there were 'problems', city dwellers lacked the peasants' first-hand knowledge of the Party's role in causing them. They were in no position, either, to doubt the official explanation of the food shortage: three years of unprecedented droughts and floods, together with Soviet demands that China repay her loans immediately and do so in food. They did not know that most of the 'debt repayments' were actually food exports designed to demonstrate the success of the Great Leap Forward; nor, in a vast country with many micro-climates, were they in a position to doubt what they were told about the bad luck with the weather. Even today, few realize that 'Compared to most other years during Mao's rule, there were fewer natural disasters during the famine.' (Becker 1996, 279-283).

Lies and censorship, however, could not disguise the fact that something had gone wrong. Even the inhabitants of privileged Beijing knew that the Great Leap Forward had not delivered the prosperity which had been promised, and that the martial rhetoric of productive victories did not match the facts. Language which had once seemed inspiring now rang hollow. In 1961, the Great Leap Forward was declared a 'success' to mask its failure, then brought to a close. In the period of reconstruction which followed, Mao's storming approach was abandoned. Moral incentives and calls for sacrifice were emphasised less, and material incentives and rational planning were emphasised more. The communes, whose powers had been cut back, allegedly continued to 'advance' (Hsia 1964, 73-4), but there was now no talk of imminent victory, and the more exaggerated military metaphors were quietly put to rest.

2.8 Emerging Mao Worship: Prelude to the Cultural Revolution

The reverence for Mao Zedong within the Communist Party began in the Yan'an period. In 1940 Liu Shaoqi was already telling Party members: 'Only the Thought of Mao Tse-tung is able to inspire us to go from victory to victory.... Mao Tse-tung is the great revolutionary leader of all the people of China, and we should learn from him.' (Dittmer 1974, 22). However, it was the Rectification of 1942-44 which consolidated Mao's power within the Party, and it was the victory over the Guomindang in 1949 which set the seal on his dominance and guaranteed an audience for his Thought throughout China as a whole.

In the early years of communist rule, Mao shared with the Party the credit for improvements in China's condition. Indeed, as Dittmer (1987, 22) notes, 'charismatic infallibility was to a considerable degree "collectivized," and the Party as a whole basked in the glow of revolutionary heroism, all the way down to the local cadres.' Mao was greatly revered, but he was not worshipped, and his Thought was often referred to as one part of a greater unity - Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. People spoke, increasingly, in political formulae, but they did not feel compelled to quote Mao at every opportunity, to justify their every statement by citing holy writ. My own survey of the first two pages of the *People's Daily* on the first day of every month, for example, shows that from 1950 to 1957 Mao was quoted on average only once every 5.6 pages, a tiny fraction of the rate of quotation achieved during the Cultural revolution (see ch. 6). Indeed, in the 1950's, quotations from the Marxist-Leninist classics appeared more often than quotations from Mao.

It was the disaster of the Great Leap Forward which 'decollectivised' charismatic infallibility. In rural areas, especially, the Party's credibility plummeted, for people knew the role which its policies had played in causing the devastation. Mao's image suffered, too, but far less than the Party's. There were three reasons for this. First, Mao's own directives had been characteristically vague, so it was easy to believe that his subordinates had misinterpreted him, or botched the execution of his plans. If the policy of 'close planting' had

not worked, maybe it was just because local cadres had insisted that the peasants plant *too* closely. If 'deep ploughing' destroyed shallow soils, this was no doubt the cadres' fault, because Mao had never said specifically that the policy should be implemented under all conditions. If the cadres diverted agricultural labour to steel production so that they could meet their quotas, leaving crops to rot in the fields, this was their decision, not Mao's. If dams collapsed because of poor construction, that was the fault of the fault of cadres who insisted that they be built hastily, without proper technical assistance.

Second, Mao's remoteness helped to preserve him from blame. Did Mao know that the Party was forcing peasants to persist with agricultural practices which had failed? Had anyone told him that the cadres were taking food from people's mouths so that they could justify their boasts of record surpluses? Did he know that people were starving to death? Many people believed that he did not know these things - that his subordinates were hiding the truth from him. They thought that if he knew the real situation policies would change (cf. Becker 1996, 268, 285; Friedman, Pickowicz & Selden 1991, 273).

Third, when at length Party leaders like Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping and Chen Yun persuaded a reluctant Mao to acknowledge the crisis and import grain for emergency relief, the Party propaganda machine gave Mao the credit. The result was that, in many people's eyes, it was Mao who had saved them from death when those lower down the Party hierarchy had caused a catastrophe. Even in 1994, when Jasper Becker travelled China conducting interviews about the famine, an old woman in Henan told him that only 80 out of 300 people in her village had survived, and that all would have perished if Chairman Mao had not sent troops with grain to rescue them (Becker 1996, 5). My own grandmother, who lived in one of the worst hit provinces, told me the same story: half the people in her village had starved to death, and but for Mao's intervention the rest would have died too.

It was Mao who had been the driving force of the Great Leap Forward. At first, he did not know that nervous subordinates were feeding his expectations by lying to him, but later he did not want to know. When Peng Dehuai told him at Lushan in 1959 that people were

starving, Mao launched a violent verbal attack, dismissed him from his position as Minister of Defence and started a witch-hunt for 'Right-opportunists' who sympathised with Peng. Then, to spite his critics, he re-doubled his commitment to his policies (Becker 1996, ch. 6). This damaged his reputation with most other leaders of the Party, because they knew what was going on, but it was the Party itself whose reputation suffered most in the eyes of the Chinese people. What was left of charismatic infallibility now resided in Mao alone.

Although the Party's standing improved as Liu, Deng, Chen Yun and others set about restoring the economy, it could not regain its former standing. Mao's reputation, however, soared, for the cult of Mao and his Word had begun. There was nothing spontaneous about this Mao-cult. It was promoted by Lin Biao, the Defence Minister, whose strategy for personal advancement was to flatter Mao outrageously and encourage the worship of his Thought. Lin began the process of sanctifying Mao's word in his own sphere, the People's Liberation Army. At his instruction, soldiers were made to learn and discuss quotations from Mao's works. From May 1961 these quotations were printed in the *Liberation Army Daily*, then in 1964 they were published in a pocket-sized book - *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong* - which was distributed throughout the PLA (Yan & Gao 1986, 191).

Once the cult of Mao's word was well established in the armed forces, Mao called upon the whole country to 'Learn from the PLA'. He accompanied this call with a battery of closely linked ideological campaigns. Their purpose was to reassert the brilliance of the ideology which had guided the Great Leap Forward, and more generally to make Mao's Thought the arbiter of right and wrong and the inspiration of all action. There was the Learn from Dazhai Campaign, in which the peasants were instructed to emulate a model brigade which had allegedly produced astonishing yields by adhering to strict socialist principles and following Mao's 'eight-character constitution' for agriculture. There was the Learn from Daqing Campaign, which peddled the doubtful claim that Mao's policies of 'self-reliance', moral incentives and dependence on workers and peasants had been responsible for the discovery and development of the massive oilfield at Daching. And there was the Campaign to Learn from Lei Feng, a model soldier whose life of revolutionary self-sacrifice, as revealed in a

fictitious diary written in his name by PLA propagandists, was based on total dedication to Mao's Thought (cf. Spence, 1991, 597). The slogans 'Learn from the PLA!', 'Learn from Dazhai!', 'Learn from Daqing!' and 'Learn from Lei Feng!' were on everyone's lips, summarizing a host of maxims which everyone had to learn, recite and apply.

The principle underlying all these slogans was expressed in one massive campaign which summed up Mao's strategy - the Campaign to 'Study and Apply Chairman Mao's Thought'. This began in March 1964 and continued until the Cultural Revolution. In schools, factories, offices, neighbourhoods and villages, teachers, cadres and special Mao Zedong Thought counsellors helped people to learn Mao's words, study them and apply them to their lives. In Chen village, for example, educated young people from the cities, who had been sent to serve the revolution in the countryside, were recruited as Mao Thought counsellors. They were made to learn by heart Mao's 'three constantly read articles' - essays dealing with the socialist virtues of service to the people, communist internationalism and perseverance in the face of difficulties. They were also instructed on how to present those essays to the peasants. Chan, Madsen and Unger (1984, 76) give one counsellor's recollection of their technique:

> We first had the peasants memorize quotations. Then we had every party member, every Communist Youth League member and every Mao thought Counselor [sic] memorize the entire articles. After that all the peasants had to memorize the articles too. But their level of literacy was really too low. The peasants weren't able to memorize the whole thing. In other localities the people had to get up in front of others and recite the articles from memory; or whole families would have to memorize them together; or a whole production team would memorize them together. These sayings of Mao were used like the Holy Scripture!

This rote learning was complemented with intensive study sessions during which the articles were explained and discussed, and the peasants were taught how to make self-criticisms in the light of their teaching. It was hoped that whenever they had to make a decision, they would think of a relevant Mao-quote and act in accordance with its principles. At times, this was exactly what happened. One production team head recalled:

> Some peasants did use what they were taught. If some member of my team lazily stopped working, some other peasant might ball him out, 'Hey, you're selfish. Chairman Mao tells us to work selflessly for the collective.' ... Some peasants patterned themselves on the quotes. [Chan, Madsen & Unger 1984, 80].

Learning entire articles was less efficient, cognitively, than learning slogans which summarized important points, but it had a similar effect. Constant repetition of the essays meant that key phrases sank into the peasants' minds, and intensive discussion turned those phrases into headings for schematically organized knowledge about the essays' practical implications. Moreover, the rote learning had one other very important consequence: it set Mao's writings above all others, reinforcing Lin's message that Mao's word was sacred, an infallible guide, the arbiter of right and wrong.

The group most susceptible to emerging Mao worship was the school students. Unlike the workers and peasants, they spent most of their days in institutions which specialized in education and indoctrination. Moreover, except for the youngest and the slowest, they were literate, and this helped enormously when it came to learning and reciting passages from Mao's works. Most students were in fact highly motivated to learn, for the education system was deliberately geared to producing political conformists. Students' prospects of going on to senior high schools and universities depended not just on their academic performance and class origin, but on their political performance as well. And a good 'political performance' meant *doing* and *saying* all the right things with at least apparent enthusiasm and sincerity. Emulating Lei Feng, ambitious and idealistic students looked for ways of helping others, and they willingly participated in routines which subjected them to linguistic engineering. They learned the 'three constantly read articles', they tried to quote Mao at appropriate times, they wrote diaries filled with stock phrases of revolutionary commitment, and they sang 'Father is close, Mother is close, but neither is as close as Chairman Mao'. Often the most enthusiastic were children of middle class background, for students from the 'red' classes sometimes took it for granted that they would be numbered amongst the politically virtuous, while students from the 'bad' classes usually knew that it was no use trying. (Chan 1985, chs 1-2; Unger 1982, chs 1-5).

Two quotations from Mao focused the students' activity. One was 'Serve the people', a rallying cry which appealed to their idealism. The other was 'Never forget class struggle!' In part, this latter slogan directed attention to the past: it kept alive the memories of people who had suffered at the hands of landlords and the Guomindang, and it evoked the sometimes fictitious stories of past injustice with which the Communist Party justified its rule. But the slogan also linked the past with the present, summoning the revolutionary masses to eternal vigilance against the re-emergence of class enemies within socialist society. Such enemies included unreformed members of the 'bad classes' who were alleged to be plotting the dispossession of the workers and peasants and the restoration of capitalist, landlord and imperialist tyranny. Most of these, of course, were outside the Party. However, from 1959, when Peng Dehuai questioned the direction of the Great Leap Forward, Mao claimed that 'bourgeois elements' and 'petty bourgeois elements' had infiltrated the Party. These were people who had joined the Party 'organizationally', but who had not done so 'in terms of their thought.' (Schram 1984, esp. 40-45). Mao believed that they lacked enthusiasm for the ideals of the Great Leap Forward and were committed to preserving and extending private production and relaxing the controls on cultural discourse. From January 1965 he began to warn against 'Party persons in authority taking the capitalist road', even at high levels, and he directed the Cultural Revolution specifically at these people. The emphasis on class struggle during the campaign to study and apply his Thought was an important influence on the passionate attacks by Red Guards and revolutionary workers on Party leaders during the Cultural Revolution.

The Campaign to Study and Apply Chairman Mao's Thought also prepared the way for the Cultural Revolution by making Mao's Word the sole criterion of right and wrong. Once that assumption was lodged securely and prominently in Chinese discourse, the Party's legitimacy depended upon its conformity to his Thought. It had no independent authority: its job was simply to 'study and apply' principles and instructions emanating from its leader. If Mao, as the definitive expositor of his Thought, attacked the Party for departing from it, then within the terms of the discourse it was impossible for the Party to deny the charge. Moreover, there were many millions of Chinese who had

grudges against individual cadres or the Party as a whole. Once they had Mao's backing, they were delighted to vent their frustrations by attacking it in his name. The discourse of the campaign to study and apply his Thought gave them total justification.

As the discourse of Mao-worship developed, Party leaders grumbled privately about the 'vulgarization' of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought (Dittmer 1987, 38). They could not, however, make their misgivings public, for they knew only too well that to challenge the emerging discourse was to challenge Mao - a course of action which would result in their own destruction. They probably knew, too, that amongst the masses, the ritualized language of Mao-worship was taking hold. As we saw in chapter 1, the 'primitive affective and associational processes' activated by a discourse are most effective when more reliable sources of knowledge are not available. So making people read, hear, learn and recite the formulae which praised Mao, a remote figure known only through his writings and the discourse of worship, was far more effective than making them sing the praises of the Party, whose vices, no less than its virtues, were the subject of daily experience.

In the villages, the language of Mao-worship took root, especially amongst young people. They were more likely to be literate, so they found it easier to learn off quotations, and they were often given the job of leading Mao study sessions. A young peasant in Chen village recalled:

> The youths truly believed in Mao's thought. In their hearts they really felt this Mao Zedong was something, thought every one of the quotations made sense. Everyone felt more progressive and public spirited. [Later], during the Cultural Revolution, we felt proud hearing the rumour that our Chairman Mao was now a leader of the world, that even the foreign visitors praised and worshipped Mao Zedong when they returned to their own countries. [Chan, Madsen & Unger 1984, 80-81].

Most young people in the cities also responded. On the one hand, the 'three constantly read articles' and the slogan 'serve the people' evoked an idealistic response which focused on the inspirational leadership of Mao himself. On the other, the slogan 'Never forget class struggle', which was constantly linked to gruesome stories of life before Liberation, was used to focus feelings of intense class hatred. So

uniform was the discourse of class bitterness that Jung Chang only once heard an adult say anything which contradicted it - and that adult was Deng Xiaoping's stepmother, who before the Cultural Revolution could perhaps afford to be a little loose with her tongue. When she said that Guomindang soldiers 'didn't always loot' and 'were not always evil', her words hit Jung Chang 'like a bombshell', shocking her so deeply that she never told anyone (Chang 1992, 348-9). Most young people heard only authorized scripts detailing Guomindang atrocities and landlord opporession, and they were effective. In Anita Chan's interviews, for example, few students felt compassion for the suffering of class enemies (Chan 1985, 107-8). If these young people later behaved brutally towards those labelled as class enemies during the Cultural Revolution, it was because they had already been taught to hate them. In its lessons of class hatred, no less than in its lessons of self-sacrifice and worship of Mao, the Campaign to Study and Apply Chairman Mao Zedong's Thought was a school for the Cultural Revolution.

2.9 Linguistic Engineering in China before the Cultural Revolution: an Assessment

Linguistic engineering had some impressive results in China before the Cultural Revolution. The most striking was the fact that, by 1966, the discourse of Maoism was hegemonic. People used its technical vocabulary as a matter of course in their daily lives; they increased their communicative efficiency by mastering its coded formulae; they shouted its revolutionary slogans on cue; they knew what to say, when to say it, and what words to use when saying it; and, just as important, they knew what not to say. People might drop the formalities of the discourse within the family and amongst close friends, but few people apart from angry peasants said anything inconsistent with it. In the cities, especially, errors could bring betrayal from false friends, and they also brought reproof from loved ones who knew the danger. When Jung Chang told her father that her new year resolution for 1965 was 'I will obey my grandmother' - a traditional way of promising good behaviour - her father shook his head: 'You should not say that. You should only say "I obey Chairman Mao."' (Chang 1992, 348). By 1965, the Mao-cult was well advanced and the discourse had room for just a single source of authority.

There are three striking pieces of evidence for the hegemonic power of Maoist discourse by the time of the Cultural Revolution. The first arises out of a comparison of the Hundred Flowers Campaign of 1957 with the Cultural Revolution. In both cases, Mao told the Party to stand back and accept criticism from outside its ranks. In the case of the 'Hundred Flowers', what this demonstrated was that many intellectuals had not accepted revolutionary discourse: their criticisms did not, as Mao had hoped, usually arise from revolutionary premises. Instead of suggesting, say, that cadres should heighten their revolutionary consciousness by doing regular manual labour alongside the workers and peasants, they complained at Party control of what they taught and what they wrote, at their intimidation by semi-literate cadres, at the savagery of campaigns directed at alleged class enemies, at the bans on so much foreign literature, at the slavish imitation of the Soviet Union, at problems caused by collectivization, at the farcical nature of elections in which the outcome was pre-determined, and even at the Communist Party's monopoly of power (Spence 1990, 570-73). These complaints did not belong to the discourse of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, but to the discourse of 'bourgeois Rightists'.

When Mao launched the Cultural Revolution in 1966, however, the dominance of Maoist discourse in the public domain was absolute. The lesson of the Hundred Flowers Campaign and of the persecution of the Rightists which followed was that only a single discourse would be tolerated. Moreover, a further nine years of linguistic engineering had consolidated the power of the discourse amongst the younger generation, particularly in the cities, and focused it on the god-like image and Thought of Mao. So when in 1966 Mao again called on people to criticise the Party, the criticism was based entirely on Maoist assumptions and was expressed entirely in Maoist language. Even though the discourse was no longer policed by the Party, it remained hegemonic: people used the approved language to say things which were based on Mao's words or Maoist propaganda. We shall see in later chapters that different groups interpreted this Maoist discourse in contradictory ways, giving it startlingly diverse referents, but this in no way alters the fact that they all spoke Maoist language, based their criticisms on arguably Maoist assumptions, and defended ostensibly Maoist goals.

The second piece of evidence arises from the behaviour of the Party when it was under attack. Its leaders might try to defend themselves in public or appeal to Mao in private, but they always did so within the terms of the discourse, even when it was being used to destroy them. Inwardly, they might believe that Mao was a tyrant gone mad, but they could never say this in public. They had to accept that Mao's Word was the criterion of correct thought, and when they defended themselves they had to use Maoist language to say Maoist things. The model defence, which has become part of Chinese political folklore, was given by Chen Yi, the Foreign Minister. Confronted by his accusers at a public meeting, he asked all those present to open their copies of *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong* at page 271. When they did so, they found themselves staring at a blank page after the last printed quotation. Looking at the page, and quoting words once spoken by Chairman Mao, Chen Yi recited, 'Chen Yi is a good comrade.' His critics fell silent.

Third, there is abundant evidence that by 1966 Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought supplied the most accessible categories of political expression and social analysis, especially amongst younger Chinese. Franz Schurmann, who interviewed many former mainlanders in Hong Kong, found amongst them a good many 'anti-Communist refugees whose way of thinking and acting is still essentially the same as it was on the Mainland.' In particular, they retained the 'special categories and language' of Maoist thought (Schurmann 1968, 48-9). Martin King Whyte discovered something similar when he interviewed Chinese students who arrived in Hong Kong between 1962 and 1968:

> Students of various motivations and degrees of activism generally phrased much of their discourse in ideological terms. Nobody felt hypocritical about using lofty words about class struggle or serving the people to characterize and justify his ordinary daily activities. This language had become the accepted form of discourse. Whatever the alteration in students' underlying attitudes, the fact that they at least analysed situations and actions in ideological terms must be considered an important kind of thought reform. [Whyte 1974, 124].

This matches perfectly my own childhood memories, the recollections of older friends, and the unanimous testimony of autobiographies

written by those who participated as young people in the Cultural Revolution (Chang 1992; Gao 1987; Min 1993; Liang & Shapiro 1983; Zhai 1992; Bennett & Montaperto 1971; Ling 1972). Younger Chinese, and many older ones too, found that the language of revolution tripped easily off the tongue. They used it without embarrassment, whether debating theoretical questions or discussing the political implications of the details of everyday life. This situation was a direct result of the fact that they used the language day in day out. 'Mere exposure' made it seem natural, and even attractive, and constant repetition ensured that the concepts and schemas to which it was linked were more accessible than any alternatives. When the Red Guards began their own newspapers during the Cultural Revolution, from the very start they applied the categories of Mao's Thought with great facility. This change in the 'natural' categories of thought was one of the most impressive results of linguistic engineering.

When a discourse becomes hegemonic, it not only affects the concepts and schemas which we use in the rational interpretation of experience, but it activates a multitude of sub-rational persuasive mechanisms:

- It turns everyone into a *model* of 'correct' thought, making dissidents feel totally alone, even leading them to doubt their own judgment.

- It means that participation in the discourse is a condition of acceptance by virtually every reference group in the country, subjecting doubters to strong *reference group effects*.

- It makes orthodoxies which are supported by no evidence sound more plausible, because their constant repetition activates the *validity effect*.

- It deploys positive and negative terms in ways which facilitate *higher order conditioning*, with friends systematically associated with positive terms and enemies systematically associated with negative ones.

- Participating in the discourse can bring rewards, while non-participation brings punishment, and both rewards and punishment can affect attitudes through *operant conditioning.*

- The discourse leads people to make statements which are relevant only in the context of politically correct assumptions, consolidating those assumptions through *retroactive strengthening.*

- It leads people with unformed attitudes to make politically correct statements from which, as *self-perception theorists* hold, they can then infer what they think.

- It leads people with 'incorrect' views to say things inconsistent with those views, producing unpleasant feelings of *cognitive dissonance* which can motivate the adoption of 'correct' views.

These mechanisms help to explain why the introduction of a new and ultimately hegemonic discourse in China had some very real successes. Its most spectacular early success was in provoking dissonance which led workers and peasants to turn rapidly against their traditional superiors. However, the discourse was equally effective in swaying attitudes when people had no alternative sources of information. Most people were easily persuaded to worship Mao because they knew him only through the discourse; most were easily persuaded to believe fictions about the outside world because they had no other sources of information; and younger Chinese were easily persuaded to adopt a distorted view of pre-Liberation China because they were too young to know that the reality was more complicated.

It was when the discourse contradicted people's experiences or well-supported beliefs that it had its biggest failures. The discourse of the Party's superior wisdom did not persuade intellectuals to agree with the cadres who told them what to write, teach and think; the discourse of socialism did not make the peasants love full-scale collectivization or the communes; the discourse of abundance during the Great Leap Forward did not deprive people of the knowledge that they were starving; and constant repetition of the slogan 'Ours is a great Party, a correct Party, a glorious Party' could not hide from the peasants the

fact that in promoting the Great Leap Forward the Party had blundered calamitously.

Linguistic engineering was equally unsuccessful in persuading landlords, capitalists, counterrevolutionaries, rich peasants, bad elements and Rightists to accept the official view of themselves. They knew too much to see themselves as the discourse described them - as one-dimensional embodiments of evil. Their children were not persuaded, either. They were pressed to denounce their parents, but few did. Victims of discrimination, they often grumbled amongst themselves and developed their own sub-culture. One bad-class interviewee told Anita Chan, 'If we became red we were degrading ourselves' (Chan 1985, 119). When the discourse came up against self-interest and self-knowledge and self-respect, its effectiveness was limited.

Both the successes and the failures of linguistic engineering prepared the way for the Cultural Revolution. The inability of official discourse to repair the Party's image problem after the Great Leap Forward made it much easier for Mao to persuade the 'revolutionary masses' to attack it during the Cultural Revolution. At the same time, the success of linguistic engineering in persuading young people to worship Mao, to love socialism and to hate class enemies enabled him to use student Red Guards as 'shock troops' in his assault on the Party and on China's traditional culture. The establishment of a hegemonic Maoist discourse was a precondition of the Cultural Revolution.

Mao had enormous faith in discourse and in the linguistic engineering which sustained it. When he launched the Cultural Revolution in 1966, he gambled everything on the power of discourse. In turning the Red Guards against the Party, he was destroying the institution which had hitherto been the main basis of his power. He still had in reserve the perhaps doubtful loyalty of the PLA, but his strategy was to try to direct events primarily by manipulating discourse. What happened when he embarked on this extraordinary course of action is discussed in Part II of this thesis.

II

THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION 1966-68:

MASS MOBILIZATION,

LANGUAGE AND INTERPRETATION

CHAPTER 3

LANGUAGE, CONTEXT AND INTERPRETATION: MAO'S MANIPULATION OF MEANING DURING THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

3.1 Background to the Cultural Revolution

The Cultural Revolution had its origins in the Communist Party's response to the failure of the People's Communes and the Great Leap Forward. Faced with incontrovertible evidence of disaster in late 1960 and early 1961, Mao was persuaded by his deputy Liu Shaoqi, Party secretary Deng Xiaoping and others that a change of course was necessary. The biggest reversal of policy affected the communes, which survived in theory but with few actual functions. The right to make economic decisions and receive payments was given to local production teams, strengthening the link between rewards and individual effort; small plots of land were 'lent' to the peasants for private cultivation; rural free markets were allowed to re-emerge; and the hated communal mess halls were abolished. There were matching reforms in industry, there was renewed emphasis on academic achievement at the expense of ideological indoctrination, and restrictions on intellectual debate were eased. All these changes were embodied in directives from the Central Committee and endorsed by Mao himself (Teiwes 1993, 345-56, 369-71; Baum 1975, 162; Becker 1996, 242-3; Goldman 1981, 19-21; Lü 1993, 13-49).

Unlike Liu and Deng, however, Mao never conceded that the communes and the Great Leap Forward were fundamentally misconceived, nor did he abandon his unorthodox views on agricultural techniques. In his eyes, the attempt to convert China into the world's first full Communist society had failed only because he and other leaders had made mistakes, because over-enthusiastic 'left adventurists' had misinterpreted his Thought, and because 'right opportunists' had undermined his policies (Becker 1996, 235-254; Teiwes 1993, 311-18, 324-7, 335-56). He may also have believed the fiction, devised by his Party's propagandists for public consumption, that the crops had failed for three successive years largely because of bad weather. What we know is that Mao brooded about the frustration of his

frustration of his plans and tried to create the conditions in which he could succeed with a second attempt at a transition to full socialism as the prelude to the nirvana of communism.

The failure of the Great Leap Forward laid the seeds of the Cultural Revolution because it sharpened the rift between determined ideologists like Mao and pragmatists like Liu and Deng. Mao was prepared to let the pragmatists dismantle some of his policies as a temporary measure to eliminate mass starvation, for he himself could suggest no alternative. But in some regions officials desperate to end the starvation permitted practices outside the letter of the Central Committee's directives, including even an unofficial reversion to family farming (Zhou 1996, 48-51). Mao therefore began to view the reforms as 'the breeding ground for rampant revisionism in the Party and the precursor to capitalist restoration in China as a whole.' (Joseph 1984, 76). He became especially suspicious of those like Liu and Deng, who had urged the reforms and supervised their implementation. His suspicions were encouraged by Jiang Qing, Lin Biao, Kang Sheng and others, who resented the power of Liu and his supporters within the Party. These people had regular contact with Mao, and he was all the more ready to listen to them because he had retired from the 'first line' of policy making and was no longer discussing policy with Liu and Deng on a regular basis. he began to complain that he was not sufficiently consulted, accusing Deng of never seeking his advice and treating him like a 'dead ancestor' at Party meetings (Joseph 1984, 262 n.65). As for Liu, by 1962 Mao was accusing him of establishing an 'independent kingdom' in policy matters (Teiwes 1993, 375, 393).

Mao's suspicions of Liu, at least, were largely without foundation. Indeed, in accordance with Mao's wishes, Liu used the Socialist Education Movement to suppress covert resumption of family farming and excessive reliance on private plots. But Mao no longer trusted him, and by January 1965 he had decided to remove him from his leading position (Teiwes 1993, xli-xliv, 399-445; Lü 1993, 145; Jin 1995, 128-9, 254).[1] Convinced that the

[1] Some Western historian have argued that Mao did not decide to topple Liu Shaoqi until he 'failed the test' by mismanaging the Cultural Revolution. This view is decisively refuted by Chinese historians, who do not doubt that by January 1965 Mao had decided to remove Liu from the leadership. This is what Mao himself said; it is what Zhou Enlai said; it is supported by the fact that from early 1965 Mao took a series of steps which prepared the way

Party was riddled with 'capitalist roaders' - by which he meant everyone who doubted the fundamental soundness of the communes and the Great Leap - he also decided to purge other highly placed leaders like Deng Xiaoping and Peng Zhen, the mayor of Beijing. And, to ensure that those who replaced them could be trusted to preserve the communes and implement another Great Leap, he decided to purify the whole Party.

How was this to be done? How could an impure party be trusted to purify itself? If asked to conduct a massive purge, with themselves as its principal victims, might not Liu and other leaders unite against him? And how could Mao get rid of the 'capitalist roaders' for good, when the established Party procedure was to retain the services of leaders who confessed their errors and promised reform? Mao's solution to these problems was to take the whole reform process out of the Party's hands and turn it over to the Chinese people. He would ask the people, who had been taught to worship him, to purify the Party, scrutinizing the words and actions of its members against the mirror of his Thought. He would give the party what he called a 'shock', subjecting it to the trauma of the Cultural Revolution (Teiwes 1993, 466). And in the process he would raise the revolutionary consciousness of 'the masses' by making them his agents in the struggle. So the political purge would be part of a wider process of ideological and cultural transformation.

Mao's first task was to create a gap between his Thought and the Party's practice, putting the Party clearly in the wrong. His problem was that the Party, despite his suspicions, had generally followed his line closely (Teiwes 1993; Jin 1995, 84). What is more, nearly everyone *thought* that the Party, despite mistakes and the lapses of individual members, had tried to be his faithful servant. So to convict the Party of wrong-doing, Mao had to change people's assumptions about what his Thought involved, then get

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for his attack on the Party; and it is supported by the argument of this chapter that the only 'test' which Mao set Liu was one which Liu would inevitably fail when Mao trapped him by switching the context of interpretation. However, although Mao plotted Liu's downfall well in advance, it seems that he did not originally intend to let him fall so far - handing him over to the Red Guards, allowing him to be framed as a class enemy, and leaving him to die, his illnesses untended. On this last point, see Dittmer 1974; for the views of Chinese historians, see Lü 1993, Jin 1995, Yan & Gao 1996, and also the reports of conversations with Chinese historians in Teiwes 1993, xli-xliv.

them to reinterpret the words and actions of the Party's members in the context of those assumptions. He did this in three stages, taking care not to alert the Party too early to the fact that it was his ultimate target.

In the first stage, he used the Party media, which were always sensitive to his explicitly expressed wishes, to popularize the new interpretive assumptions in a campaign directed at writers who had praised the reforms of 1961-62, and who had thereby indirectly criticised the mistakes of the Great Leap Forward. Since the campaign was directed at the peripheral area of culture, the Party as a whole had no reason to be alarmed. It supported the campaign against the writers, teaching the new assumptions to the Chinese people, never realizing that Mao would one day use those same assumptions to reinterpret the words and actions of the Party leaders themselves.

In the second stage, Mao spread what had been a purely 'Cultural Revolution' to the schools and universities, calling on the students to use the new interpretive assumptions to root out 'anti-socialist' elements in educational institutions. Again, people like Liu Shaoqi had no reason to feel threatened, especially since Mao entrusted to them the task of supervising the Revolution. They sent out work teams to ensure that students were thoroughly indoctrinated with the new assumptions, while taking care that they were not turned against the Party itself.

In the third stage, having used the Party to whip up youthful enthusiasm for the Revolution, Mao accused Liu and other leaders of using the work teams to suppress it. He demanded that the masses be allowed to mobilize freely, using the new assumptions to criticise the Party itself. The Party, once the organizer of the Cultural Revolution, was now revealed as its main target. Even worse, Mao now introduced yet a new interpretive assumption: that everyone who had attempted to direct the Revolution, rather than allowing the masses to mobilize freely, was a counter-revolutionary. So the whole Party had sinned, and Mao called upon the masses to deliver judgment upon it and mete out punishment. The result was the virtual destruction of the Party in late 1966 and early 1967.

This chapter will use the framework provided by Relevance Theory to show how Mao and his supporters were able to manipulate the context of interpretation by introducing the new assumptions. In this way, they led

the 'revolutionary masses' to adopt new readings of what people had said and done during the reform period in 1961-62 and during the early stages of the Cultural Revolution. So words which had once been understood as supporting socialism were now construed as anti-socialist, and those who had uttered them were attacked in Mao's name.

The chapter will also show how the new interpretive assumptions could be used to attribute counter-revolutionary sentiments to anyone at all. My task, again within the framework provided by Relevance Theory, will be to show how *other* assumptions led them to single out particular groups of people for attack. I will also show how contrasting assumptions held by people with different class backgrounds produced divergent interpretations of Mao's message. This led to the emergence of different factions of Red Guards and workers, all fighting each other in Mao's name.

Finally, the chapter will describe how Mao, having created a new set of interpretive assumptions to bring about the Cultural Revolution in 1966, lost control of the context of interpretation during 1967 and early 1968 as the country plunged into chaos. He then abandoned some of the assumptions which he had used to initiate the Revolution, and in mid-1968 used the People's Liberation Army to restore order and enforce yet another set of interpretive assumptions. Within this new context of interpretation, the words and deeds of the revolutionary students who had served his purpose by sweeping away the Communist Party were seen as counter-revolutionary.

For most Chinese, Mao was a god with great authority and even greater power. His authority meant that most people believed whatever he told them. He could also use his power to *make* people say things, whether or not they believed what they said. And whenever they wrote or spoke, he could frequently change the meaning of their words by manipulating the context of interpretation. It was Mao's dominance of the word and his ability partially to determine meaning which was the basis of his power during the early months of the Cultural Revolution. And, we shall see, it was his eventual inability to control the context of interpretation undermined his control of meaning and forced him to resort to force to restore order.

3.2 The Protagonists: Mao's Supporters and their Victims

In launching the Cultural Revolution, Mao relied upon two groups. The first was the People's Liberation Army (PLA), under the Defence Minister Lin Biao. Since Mao first began to doubt the loyalty of senior ministers in 1962, Lin Biao had won his favour by displays of constant sycophancy, by promoting the study of Mao's Quotations and by orchestrating the personality cult which led many millions of young Chinese to think of their Great Leader as a god. Then, in the months leading up to the Cultural Revolution, the PLA took an important role in promoting an intensified Mao-study campaign. This laid the basis for Mao's strategy of mobilizing the population to scrutinize the Party in the light of his Thought (Baum 1975, 138-9, 143, 145-6; Dittmer 1987, 79, 118; Jin 1995, 134-7). Moreover, when Mao moved against the Party in 1966, both Lin Biao and the PLA gave him consistent support. And, as the Party crumbled, the PLA grew in influence and power.

Mao's second group of supporters consisted of his wife Jiang Qing, her long-time supporter Kang Sheng and a group of radical intellectuals whom she had gathered around her. The most notable of these were the Shanghai intellectuals Yao Wenyuan and Zhang Chunqiao. Jiang Qing and her group had at first no institutional power, but they had Mao's support, they had the full cooperation of Lin Biao and the PLA, and they had ready access to the *Liberation Army Daily* and radical Shanghai newspapers. Moreover, with Mao's backing they could publish their views in other outlets. They worked very closely with him in launching the Cultural Revolution, working out strategy, giving him drafts of articles for comment and approval, and consulting him on all major issues. It was their writings which articulated the successive shifts in the context of interpretation which gave the Revolution its momentum. And, as the Party collapsed under the assaults which they orchestrated, their power grew.

Mao's strategy was calculated to weaken the Party's position, while giving no indication that he was preparing a full scale assault. What he did was to focus his attack on the party's vulnerable cultural policy, giving no hint that he intended to cause an upheaval in the Party as a whole. To do this he chose as his targets three writers who had enthusiastically supported the reforms of 1961-62. Equally important, they were linked to the central Propaganda Department, to the Ministry of Culture, to the Beijing press and

to Peng Zhen - the Mayor of Beijing, an influential formulator of cultural policy and in Mao's mind a leading 'capitalist roader'. If these writers could be discredited, then with skilful management the issue could be used to justify a purge of their protectors. Mao could then nominate replacements who were loyal to him, rather than to the Party, and strengthen his position for a more extensive attack.

The three writers who served Mao's purpose were the historian, essayist, playwright and vice-mayor of Beijing, Wu Han; the historian, journalist and member of the secretariat of the Beijing Party Committee, Deng Tuo; and the writer Liao Mosha, a prominent member of the Beijing Party Committee and the central Propaganda Department. Wu Han was an expert on Ming history whom Mao admired and invited for private talks about his research. He had written a series of articles and a play on the upright Ming official Hai Rui, who was dismissed from office after fighting the peasants' oppressors and boldly criticising the emperor for dogmatism and foolish policies. His most specific targets were almost the excesses of the Great Leap Forward and Mao himself (Pusey 1969), but he expressed himself in allegories which could be interpreted in more general ways.[2] Amongst those who preferred a more general interpretation was Mao himself, who in 1963 and 1964 protected Wu Han from attack by Jiang Qing, Kang Sheng and their circle. More important for Mao's purposes, Wu Han was also protected by Peng Zhen and the Propaganda Department, so if he lost Mao's favour they were in danger. (Goldman 1981, 118, 130; Teiwes 1993, lxi, 461; Jin 1995, 139-41; Yan & Gao 1996, ch. 1).

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[2] Chinese historians, anxious to defend victims of the Cultural Revolution, deny that Wu Han made Mao and the Great Leap his targets. (See, for instance, Jin 1995, 139-41, and Yan & Gao 1996, ch. 1). These historians take at face value Wu Han's public criticism of 'right opportunist elements', suppressed by Mao, who might think of themselves as Hai Ruis dismissed for speaking out about the Great Leap. Western historians, by contrast, have seen Wu Han's criticism as not only a matter of common prudence, but as evidence that he saw the connection between the 'right opportunists' and Hai Rui. He may even have used the criticism as a politically correct way of advertising the connection (Pusey 1969). Whatever the merits of this last point, my own view is that Wu Han, like most in his circle, sympathised with the views of the 'right opportunists'. His criticisms of 'right opportunists', even when allegorically defending them, were the price of survival in Mao's China.

Wu Han, Deng Tuo and Liao Mosha attracted the attention of the Jiang Qing and her radical intellectuals with a series of essays in the Beijing journal *Frontline* published between January 1961 and September 1962 under the title 'Notes from Three-Family Village'. Some of the essays were subtle allegories criticising aspects of the Great Leap Forward and extreme Left policies and thinking. Distasteful as these essays were to Jiang Qing and her circle, nearly everything in them was perfectly in line with official Communist Party policy. Mao himself recognized that Leftist errors had caused problems and he criticized them, even where they were based upon enthusiastic interpretations of his own earlier pronouncements. Moreover, as we have seen, Mao went along with the emasculation of the communes, the partial restoration of private production and free markets, attempts to raise academic standards, and the easing of restrictions on intellectual debate. He even advocated better relations with 'revisionist' Russia and sanctioned the rehabilitation of some officials who in 1959-60 had been criticized as 'right opportunists' but whose skills were now needed to stabilize the economy (Teiwes 1993, 312-18, 325-7, 345-56, 369-73; Joseph 1984, 82-119; Baum 1975, 162). It was only in August 1962, when the spectre of mass starvation had begun to fade, that Mao let it be known that the reform process which he had endorsed had gone too far and should be rolled back. And, obediently, most members of the Party did exactly what they thought he wanted. Deng Tuo immediately stopped writing 'Evening Chats at Yanshan', Wu Han said nothing more about Hai Rui, and 'Notes from Three Family Village' became totally innocuous. They knew Mao's power, and as good communists schooled in democratic centralism, they toed the new Party line.

This did not save them during the Cultural Revolution, for Mao's aim was precisely to purge those who had welcomed the policies which he himself had reluctantly backed between January 1961 and August 1962. The three writers exemplified the sort of people whom he no longer trusted. However, to justify their fate, Mao had to construe their words and actions in the period January 1961-August 1962 as deliberate attacks on his policies and on those of the Communist Party Central Committee which he dominated. How was this to be managed? Simply by insisting that everyone accept a Revised Version of what Mao and the Central Committee had said and done at the time - a version which falsely denied Mao's complicity in the policies which he now condemned. This Revised Version, we shall see, was part of a radically new context of interpretation which

enabled attempts to defend socialist principles in 1961-62 to be reinterpreted as attempts to destroy it.

3.3 Mao's First Shift in the Context of Interpretation: the Campaign against Wu Han

When Mao decided to get rid of Liu Shaoqi in January 1965, it took him only a few months to set in train a course of events which would not only topple Liu but all the other Party leaders whom he suspected of betraying his Thought. He took the first step when he commissioned Jiang Qing and her group to prepare a critique of Wu Han's play *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*. Yao Wenyuan wrote the critique, but it went through nine drafts, was extensively discussed, and Mao himself went over it three times (Jin 1995, 139-41). The article accused Wu Han of praising feudal values, and of allegorically criticizing the Great leap Forward and collective ownership of land. It also hinted that he was calling for the reinstatement of the 'right-opportunists' whom Mao had dismissed for criticizing the Great Leap Forward in 1959. The critique was trenchant, but Wu Han was addressed as 'Comrade' to indicate that although he had committed errors he was not considered an opponent of the Party (Pusey 1969).

When the article first appeared in a Shanghai newspaper, it brought predictable protests from the Beijing Party Committee, led by Peng Zhen. What angered them was that Yao Wenyuan had broken Party norms by attacking someone under the jurisdiction of another municipal committee and that he had by-passed the central Party group headed by Peng Zhen whose task was to oversee the reform of culture. However, once Mao let it be known that the article had his blessing, Peng Zhen took steps to publicize it widely. Then Mao set his trap, putting Peng Zhen in charge of the criticism of Wu Han while letting him believe that the latter's offence was relatively minor. He let Peng Zhen think that a couple of months of academic criticism was all that was required and even assured him that Wu Han could continue as vice-mayor after the criticism had concluded. So Peng did what he thought Mao wanted, and on the basis of his assurances about Mao's attitude the central Propaganda Department, the Ministry of Culture, the *People's Daily* and the Central Committee itself all endorsed a mild prosecution of Wu Han, defending him from the most serious charges. (On

the above, see Teiwes 1993, xliii-xliv, lx-lxi, 460-67, 505 n.108, 510 nn.167-70; Lu 1993, 193-204).

In all of this, Mao was being deliberately deceitful. As Jiang Qing put it, 'Peng Zhen was risking his life to protect Wu Han. While the Chairman was well aware of this, he didn't want to say it openly.' (Teiwes 1993, 462; Lu 1993, 197). Then on 28 March 1966 Mao dropped his bombshell, declaring with his full authority that Wu Han was anti-socialist, that Hai Rui did indeed represent the right-opportunists, and that the play was an attack on the Central Committee and Mao himself. He accused the Party's cultural officials of ignoring instructions to deal with people like Wu Han and declared that the central Propaganda Department 'is literally "the imperial court of Hades," and we are duty-bound to overthrow it.' (Jin 1995, 149; Goldman 1981, 130). He viciously attacked Peng Zhen, falsely but plausibly accusing him of defying his wishes and of misleading the Central Committee about the correct attitude to Wu Han. So Mao had tricked Peng Zhen, the central Propaganda Department, the cultural officials and the *People's Daily* into appearing to defy him (cf. Jin 1995, 144). He had done this, moreover, using what was to become his standard tactic during the Cultural Revolution: he had 'framed' his victims by using his unchallengeable authority to change the context of interpretation. By revealing his 'true' attitude towards Wu Han and by misrepresenting what he had said to Peng Zhen, Mao had supplied to the Central Committee a new set of interpretive assumptions:

1. Wu Han had deliberately attacked socialism, the Central Committee and Mao himself.

2. Mao had indicated to Peng Zhen that Wu Han should be attacked as an anti-Party element, rather than given mild academic criticism as a comrade who had committed errors of thought.

3. Peng Zhen had ignored Mao's instructions.

4. Peng Zhen had deceived the Central Committee about Mao's wishes.

These assumptions did not affect the Central Committee's view as to what message Peng Zhen had intended to convey, but they radically changed its

interpretation of (a) *what he really thought* and (b) *what he was trying to achieve by conveying that message.* Once the new assumptions were accepted, Peng Zhen's report to the Central Committee had to be construed as a dishonest attempt to protect an anti-socialist, anti-Party element from criticism, and as defiance of the authority of the leader of the Central Committee - Chairman Mao himself. The inevitable conclusion was that Peng Zhen, like Wu Han, was an anti-Party element, as were the propaganda department and others named by Mao as Wu Han's protectors.

However, Mao's attack on Wu Han's alleged anti-socialist protectors was carefully limited in scope, for his fourth interpretive assumption let most members of the Central Committee off the hook, allowing that it was only because Peng Zhen had deceived them that they had been content with a campaign of mild academic criticism against Wu Han. So by making excuses for the Central Committee, Mao gave it a chance to redeem itself. Its members could save their own necks by enthusiastically following its Chairman's line. This meant that Mao was able to use its power and that of the central Party organs to bring down Peng Zhen and the Beijing Municipal Committee, and to purge the central Propaganda Department, the Ministry of Culture and the *People's Daily*. In every case he was able to replace disgraced officials with allies obedient to his will. He was also able to get the Central Committee to set up a Cultural Revolution Group whose key members were his own secretary, Chen Boda, his wife Jiang Qing, her old patron Kang Sheng and her group of radical intellectuals. He had thus gained total control of the media, propaganda and culture, as well as giving his closest supporters a position of institutional power mandated by the Central Committee itself. But all of this took about two months, and to hasten the process and prepare the ground for a full scale attack on the Party leadership, Mao executed two further shifts in the context of interpretation. These are the subjects of the following two sections.

3.4 Mao's Second Shift in the Context of Interpretation: the Campaign against Deng Tuo and 'Three Family Village'

Mao's onslaught against Peng Zhen was the signal for a greatly intensified blitz against Wu Han. From the beginning of April until 8 May the *People's Daily* published no fewer than 64 articles attacking him for his 'political crimes', his 'academic errors' and his bourgeois background (Pusey 1969, 50,

58-9). Most of the articles were very long. But after 8 May, criticism of Wu Han was almost entirely subsumed by a wider campaign against 'Three-Family Village', whose other residents were his colleagues Deng Tuo and Liao Mosha. Deng Tuo, as secretary of the Beijing Party Committee and founder and editor of its theoretical journal *Frontline*, was the senior member of the group and very much the principal focus of criticism. The critiques covered not only his part in producing 'Notes from Three-Family Village' but his other writings - including a history of famine relief in China and, especially, a column which he wrote under the title 'Evening Chats at Yanshan'. The attacks twisted his words and ruthlessly distorted the context in which they were written, using techniques developed by Kang Sheng during the Party Rectification of 1942-44. (An example of Kang's technique is reproduced in Dai 1994, 146-55).

The campaigns against Wu Han and 'Three-Family Village' overlapped for a time, for the latter had been initiated on 8 March by none other than Jiang Qing, writing under the pen-name of Gao Ju in the *Liberation Army Daily* (Chuang 1970, 19). Basing itself squarely on the Revised Version of Party history which denied Mao's complicity in the reforms of 1961-62, her article bore the title 'Open Fire at the Black Anti-Party and Anti-socialist Line!' It described Deng Tuo as 'the manager of the Three-Family Village "gangster inn" run by Wu Han, Liao Mosha and himself', then called for a crusade:

> Deng Tuo's 'Evening Chats at Yenshan [Yanshan]' is couched in one hundred per cent gangster double talk which is directed against the Party and against socialism. We must identify it, see through it and uncover it, ridding it of its disguises and exposing the ugly anti-Party and anti-socialist features of Deng Tuo and his clique to the light of day. [Quoted in Chuang 1970, 19].

In the wake of Jiang Qing's onslaught, criticism of 'Three-Family Village' was carefully orchestrated, reaching a crescendo in May and June when the official newspapers spent at least one page every day denouncing Deng Tuo alone (Chuang 1970, 19). This literature of denunciation played an important role in spreading the interpretive assumptions which are the focus of this chapter. These assumptions were used to justify Mao's claim that highly placed members of the Party had abandoned socialism, they were used to give new meanings to the words and actions of countless

others, and they helped to give the Cultural Revolution its capricious and terrible character.

To uncover these assumptions, I will use the framework provided by Relevance Theory to examine the most famous attack on the writings of Deng Tuo, Wu Han and Liao Mosha: Yao Wenyuan's 'On "Three-Family Village" - The Reactionary Nature of Evening Chats at Yenshan and Notes from Three-Family Village'. This essay was first published in two Shanghai newspapers on 10 May 1966, and its essential parts have been translated into English and published under the title 'Destroy the "Gangster Inn" Run by Deng Tuo, Wu Han and Liao Mosha' (Yao 1966). It is important for our purposes not only because Yao was such a close associate of Jiang Qing, but because it was republished all over China, studied with great attention, and became a model for the interpretation and criticism of literary texts and even spoken remarks during the Cultural Revolution. The principles of interpretation which it lays down and the purportedly factual assumptions which it puts forward help to explain why the Cultural Revolution caught such vast numbers in its net. These principles also help to explain why those who were accused were powerless to correct misinterpretations of their words.

Yao's reading of the writers associated with 'Three-Family Village' was based on certain very specific assumptions. The best way to discover what they were is to look at some of his interpretations and see what assumptions are required to make sense of them. Take, for example, his discussion of Deng Tuo's essay 'Guide Rather than Block':

> On April 13, 1961 Teng T'o [Deng Tuo] demanded in his essay "Guide Rather than Block" that "everything" should be "actively guided to facilitate its smooth development." "Blocking the path of the movement and development of things" is "doomed to failure." "Everything," please note, including those dark, reactionary things that are anti-Party and anti-socialist. If we are to persist in the socialist road, we have to block the road to the restoration of capitalism ... To clear the way for the tide of revolution, we must dam the tide of reaction. By demanding that instead of blocking we should "facilitate the smooth development" of "everything", including anti-socialist things, was not Teng T'o clearly demanding that we should practise bourgeois liberalization and bend and surrender to the ill winds which were blowing at the time, the winds of "going it alone" (i.e. the restoration of individual economy) and of the extension of plots for private use and of free markets, the increase

> of small enterprises with sole responsibility for their own profits and losses, and the fixing of output quotas based on the household? "Guiding" meant paving the way, and these men styled themselves "the vanguard paving the way" - for the capitalist forces. [Yao 1966, 99-100].

The context of Deng Tuo's article, of course, was the retreat from the Great Leap Forward which Mao had endorsed. That retreat saw attacks on the error of "voluntarism" - the belief that revolutionary fervour, effort and will power could transcend the limitations supposedly imposed by nature and objective social conditions (Joseph 1984, 87-8). By contrast, there was a return to a more orthodox Marxist position, forgotten in the euphoria of the early stages of the Great Leap, that

> The transition from socialism to communism is a course of objective historical development not influenced by the will of the people. After we have recognized and grasped the objective laws of development, we may develop our subjective capacity to accelerate the course of historical development. We cannot change these laws at random on our own subjective whims, nor can we bypass this historical development stage and leap into communism. [*China Youth*, 1959, no. 1, quoted in Joseph 1984, 88].

Repeated warnings against voluntarism and a renewed emphasis on the laws of historical development were an important feature of the mutual cognitive environment of Deng Tuo and his readers in 1961. In that context most readers would easily have understood his warning that 'Blocking the path of the movement and development of things' is 'doomed to failure'. He was criticizing the 'voluntarist' errors committed during the Leap, as Mao himself had done (Joseph 1984, 69), and reminding his readers of the elementary Marxist principle that humans cannot, by acts of will, defy the laws of nature or of historical development.

And what about Deng Tuo's statement that 'everything' should be 'actively guided to facilitate its smooth development'? Another part of the mutual cognitive environment which he shared with his readers was knowledge that the Party was trying to stimulate productive development by calling for stronger central planning and the rational allocation of resources (Joseph 1984, 101-2). This was a reaction against the poor planning and uncoordinated mass action of the Great Leap, and in 1961

Mao, like almost everyone else, saw it as a healthy reaction. Deng Tuo's readers would not have misunderstood his reference.

Yao Wenyuan, however, took advantage of the sweeping nature of the pronoun 'everything' to argue that because Deng Tuo said that 'everything' should be 'actively guided to facilitate its smooth development' he was giving people coded advice to promote the 'smooth development' of capitalism. Reading his article in 1961, probably no one would have interpreted it in this way. People knew, of course, that the Party, with Mao's approval, was carefully supervising the reintroduction of restricted markets and some private production (using family labour, not wage labour), and some may well have thought that this was one of the changes which Deng Tuo thought should be 'actively guided' rather than allowed to develop chaotically. But no one loyal to the Party's line would have believed that this policy was aimed at the restoration of capitalism, and no one who thought that Deng Tuo was supporting this policy would have believed that he was seeking to destroy socialism. The reason is simply that they shared with him a cognitive environment in which the following assumptions were readily accessible:

1. Full socialism is possible only at a high level of development of the productive forces, which China has not yet reached.

2. At China's current stage of development, the productive growth which is necessary for socialism requires the temporary and partial reintroduction of private sector economic activity.

3. The Communist Party, under Chairman Mao's guidance, is allowing this temporary expansion of the private sector to create the material pre-conditions for socialism.

This was totally orthodox technological determinist Marxism. It had been eclipsed during the Great Leap Forward, when Mao had tried to transcend these alleged laws of historical development by sponsoring mass effort to boost production within the framework of the communes. But the attempt failed and orthodox Marxism re-emerged to justify the expansion of the private sector which seemed the fastest way of cleaning up the mess. This orthodox Marxist justification for private sector activity was part of the mutual cognitive environment of Deng Tuo and his

readers in 1961. It ensured that no one who read his article as an endorsement of the Communist Party's expansion of the private sector would think that he was advocating the restoration of capitalism.

But Yao Wenyuan, in 1966, was determined that the Chinese people should adopt a very different reading of Deng Tuo's essay - a reading which saw it as one of a series of 'direct attacks on the Central Committee of the Communist Party, on Chairman Mao and the General Line [of building socialism by achieving ever greater results]' (Yao 1966, 108). To sustain this interpretation of Deng Tuo's essay, Yao had to replace the context of interpretation which I have sketched above with a radically new one. It had four crucial assumptions:

1. *Chairman Mao's enemies often cunningly express their anti-socialist message in allegories and codes, and the anti-socialist message is often conveyed by what appear to be the most innocent of statements.*

2. *The Great Leap Forward was a resounding success, and to attack any aspect of the Ultra-Left philosophy which had inspired it was to attack its architect, Chairman Mao, and the very idea of socialism.*

3. *Mao and the Central Committee had consistently opposed the steps towards privatization, restoration of markets and liberalization which occurred in 1961-62.*

4. *The expansion of the private sector was not a temporary measure intended to promote economic recovery and the growth of the productive forces necessary for the transition to socialism. Rather, it was the first stage in a conscious attempt to restore a fully fledged capitalist system.*

The first of these assumptions helped to make more plausible Yao's otherwise far-fetched analysis of what Deng Tuo was referring to when he used the pronoun 'everything'. The second assumption justified Yao's belief that Deng Tuo's implicit criticism of the 'voluntarism' and lack of careful planning which occurred during the Great Leap Forward was an attack on Chairman Mao and a smear on socialism. The third assumption allowed him to interpret support for the expansion of the private sector as an attempt to sabotage the policies of Mao and the Central Committee. And

the fourth assumption enabled him to see any endorsement of such expansion as a declaration of support for the restoration of capitalism.

All of these assumptions were used with devastating effect during the Cultural Revolution to 'prove' that perfectly innocent people had opposed Mao and sought the restoration of capitalism. But the effects of the first assumption - that the enemies of socialism hide their message by using allegories and codes - were particularly pernicious and wide-ranging. Consider how Yao uses this assumption to detect the hidden meaning of another of Deng Tuo's essays, which he discusses in connection with Wu Han's essay 'On Waves':

> Two articles typified how Three-Family Village sized up the situation during this period [of rampant revisionism on the Soviet model]. The first, "On Waves" by Wu Han, appeared on January 1 1962. With irrepressible fanaticism he hailed the "wave" that had been pounding society "during the past half year and more." He joyously declared that "this is a really big tidal wave," advertising the counter-current against the Party leadership and the dictatorship of the proletariat as one of its achievements. He predicted that this "tidal wave" would grow "bigger and bigger." ... Shortly afterwards, on February 4, in his article "This Year's Spring Festival" ... Teng T'o wrote even more explicitly, "The bitter cold of the north wind will soon come to an end. In its stead a warm east wind will blow and a thaw will soon set in on this earth." Was not "thaw" one of the terms in the out-and-out counter-revolutionary vocabulary used by the Khrushchev revisionist clique against Stalin? Blinded by inordinate ambition, this gang now predicted that by 1962 socialist New China would "soon come to an end," that the dictatorship of the proletariat would be toppled by the anti-socialist adverse "tidal wave" ... Comrades, you can see how eagerly this group wished China to have a revisionist "thaw!" [Yao 1966, 105].

The interpretation of Wu Han's essay 'On Waves' as an anti-Party and anti-socialist document, of course, is based on assumptions three and four above, which assert falsely (a) that Mao and the Central Committee had opposed the policies which Wu Han applauded and (b) that these policies were aimed at the restoration of capitalism. But the key to Yao's interpretation of Deng Tuo's innocuous essay on "This Year's Spring Festival" is the first assumption: that the anti-socialist message is often concealed in allegories and codes. The essay looks forward to the coming year, associating the 'warm east wind' with the better times ahead. Deng Tuo may well have believed that the improvement would be the result of the

Party's new policies and that those policies would make further progress over the next twelve months, but he does not say this. So Yao is forced to rest his case that Deng Tuo is talking about a coming counter-revolution entirely on the fact that the essay uses the word "thaw" - a word which the arch-revisionist Khruschev once used to describe a possible improvement in relations with the capitalist West.

Without the first assumption about the prevalence of codes, Yao's interpretation appears nonsensical. Deng Tuo uses the word 'thaw', very appropriately, in a totally different context to describe what happens in the northern Chinese spring as the winds sweeping down from Siberia begin to fade and warmer winds from the east (or more precisely the south-east) melt the ice and snow. A more kindly disposed critic, conducting a forced search for deep allegorical meaning, might ask why Deng Tuo refers to the east wind, rather than making a more literally accurate reference to the south-east wind. The answer, such a critic might suggest, is that the east wind is the conventional symbol for Mao's revolutionary communism, while the north wind over which it prevails is the symbol of the revisionist country from which north wind blows. In that case Deng Tuo could be seen as forecasting the triumph of revolutionary Maoism over Soviet revisionism. Such a reading is unlikely, but it has two merits: it is based on well known symbolism and it explains a literal inaccuracy in Deng Tuo's text. Yao's reading has no merit at all, except that it serves his political purpose of convicting Deng Tuo of marching to the tune of Soviet revisionism while using cunning codes to communicate with fellow conspirators. But in China, politics was all. Yao had Mao's backing and his critique of Deng Tuo and his colleagues became a model for the detection of 'hidden messages'.

Millions of students studied Yao's polemic in the hope that they could imitate it, using the assumptions and the methods of analysis which it employed to unmask 'capitalist roaders' and 'revisionists'. As they studied Yao's text, most acquired the four assumptions which we have already discussed - assumptions which they used to help determine *what message speakers and writers intended to convey.* But they also acquired two more assumptions which took the process of interpretation a step further - assumptions which they used to help determine *what the speaker or writer was trying to achieve by conveying that message.* One assumption, the fifth in our series, enabled the critics to explain away anomalous statements by their victims. It can be expressed as follows:

5. *If revisionists make statements which praise Mao or defend socialism, those statements are mere camouflage for anti-socialist goals.*

Yao put this assumption to work, for example, when trying to explain why 'Notes from Three-Family Village' featured an article which expressed approval of 'Comrade Mao Tse-tung's policy of self-reliance'. Since 'self-reliance' was a key policy of the Great Leap Forward, the content of the article seemed difficult to reconcile with Yao's claim that Deng Tuo and his colleagues consistently opposed the socialist line. But Yao was not so easily taken in. The anti-socialist clique associated with Three-Family Village, he explained, feared exposure, so they praised Mao insincerely 'in order to cover their retreat.' (Yao 1966, 110-111). So the residents of Three-Family Village, like so many later victims of the Cultural Revolution, could cite nothing which they had said or done in their defence: if they spoke or acted like true revolutionaries, it was simply because their were covering their tracks. As a widely used slogan of the Cultural Revolution put it, they were 'Waving Red Flags to oppose the Red Flag.'

The final assumption which operated throughout Yao's essay was equally damaging to those criticized. It can be expressed thus:

6. *If revisionists make self-criticisms, then they are insincere; they are simply trying to avoid punishment so that they can live to fight another day.*

Yao employed this interpretive principle freely. For example, when the magazine *Frontline* and the *Beijing Daily* attacked their former columnists from Three-Family Village and carried an editorial self-criticism, Yao denounced their recantation as 'a gross lie' and a 'huge swindle'. They were, he said, 'making a fake criticism in the hope of slipping by'; they were 'simply putting on a show of criticism to resist the instructions of the Central Committee of the Party.' (Yao 1966, 91-3). In denouncing their self-criticism, Yao expressed Mao's unrelenting determination to destroy everyone associated with Deng Tuo, for the secretariat of the Central Committee (which Mao controlled) had itself declared the self-criticism of Deng Tuo's former colleagues to be feigned (Lee 1978, 15-16). This refusal to believe in the sincerity of self-criticisms had important consequences later in the Cultural Revolution, for young Red Guards who took their principles

of interpretation from Mao and Yao could never be convinced that those whom they accused had seen the error of their ways. As a result, their victims were denied the traditional method of securing re-acceptance through the 'correction' of their thought; they could do nothing to show that they were loyal 'comrades' who had merely made a mistake. Their fate was to be condemned as 'enemies' of the people. Probably between one and a half and two million such 'enemies' had been killed as 'landlords' or 'counterrevolutionaries' at the Party's direction since 1949 (see ch. 2.4 above). During the Cultural Revolution, classification as an 'enemy' sometimes had equally dire consequences.

Mao's standing within China was such that once his endorsement of Yao's polemic was known it was reprinted in all the major newspapers and magazines, then distributed for study. The response was carefully organized by the Party, and almost instantaneous. *China Youth*, the official paper of the Communist Youth League, announced that within two weeks of the publication of Yao's article it had 'received more than thirty-nine thousand letters from young people in various areas unanimously attacking the black gang of Three-Family Village' (Chuang 1970, 2). Yao's polemic also inspired a mass of imitative journalism, as writers and editors sought to protect themselves by showing their acceptance of the new, more extreme line. This torrent of words was based entirely on the assumptions in Yao's article. It helped to effect a 'paradigm shift' in the cognitive environment which people used - publicly at least - when assessing whether an utterance was pro-Party or anti-Party, socialist or anti-socialist.

That shift in the mutual cognitive environment of public discourse not only facilitated communication of the new message, but it had profound persuasive effects. It was not simply that the media, backed by Mao's immense authority, asserted that the Revised Version of Party history and Yao's other assumptions were factual. What was more important was the way in which every organ of opinion *assumed* that they were true, making repeated statements whose meaning could be recovered only in the context of Yao's assumptions. Even the standard slogan 'Condemn the black, anti-Party, anti-socialist line' could not be disambiguated and assigned a definite reference in isolation, for it was simply a linguistically encoded representation in which the adjectives 'black', 'anti-Party' and 'anti-socialist' were semantically incomplete. What was 'black', 'anti-Party' and 'anti-socialist' depended upon assumptions about party policy which

were contested and which changed over time, so the slogan was unintelligible to anyone lacking access to the particular set of assumptions to which the speaker was appealing. The slogan is a classic case of words which provide what Blakemore calls 'only a very skeletal clue as to the explicature the hearer is intended to recover'; and, as she stresses, the process of developing the semantic representation of those words into an explicature 'depends heavily on contextual information.' (1992, 59; also Sperber and Wilson 1995, 176-83). That contextual information was provided by Yao's assumptions, which asserted that the policies implemented in 1961-62 had been opposed by Mao and the Central Committee and had been intended to restore capitalism.

All over China, many times a day, speakers and writers produced political statements and imperatives which came with a guarantee of relevance - a guarantee which was fulfilled only when their words were disambiguated and assigned reference through being processed in the context of Yao's interpretive assumptions. Every time meaning was recovered in that context, the addressee was made aware that the writer or speaker intended him to accept Yao's assumptions as true; and if the addressee trusted the writer or speaker, that trust could strengthen his faith in those assumptions through what Sperber and Wilson have called a process of 'retroactive strengthening' (1995, 115-7). What made retroactive strengthening such a powerful weapon of state-directed persuasion was that almost the entire Chinese population was manipulated into making repeated statements which were relevant only in the context of Yao's assumptions. This meant that almost all communicators seemed to accept those assumptions as true and to expect their audiences to do likewise. People who inwardly rejected the assumptions could imagine that they were the only unbelievers in the whole country. As time went on, they could begin to doubt their own memories about what Mao and the Central Committee had actually said in 1961-62; and they could lose faith in the official ideology of those years which explained that the partial reversion to private enterprise was a temporary expedient designed to raise the productive forces to a level at which full socialism could be introduced. When almost everyone seemed to take Yao's assumptions for granted, younger sceptics, especially, were swayed by strong modelling effects. When virtually every reference group consisted entirely of people who wrote and spoke as if the assumptions were true, secret dissenters felt at odds with those to whom they customarily looked for a lead, fearing exposure by those

whose acceptance they needed. As long as they harboured doubts, they felt like social isolates. Only when they became true believers could they belong; and only then, as social beings, could they be happy.

When the writing and speech of a whole society took the assumptions embodied in Yao's essay for granted, only the strongest could stand against the tide, appearing to believe but maintaining strong inward dissent. By controlling what everyone said, Mao's propagandists were able to destroy old assumptions and manipulate new ones into existence. In the process they shattered the mutual cognitive environment which had bound Deng Tuo and his readers together before September 1962, ensuring that his words would not be seen as anti-Party or anti-socialist. Now, with the help of the new cognitive environment, essays which had been read as properly revolutionary were seen as nothing more than 'poisonous weeds' designed to destroy the revolution. Deng Tuo had become a pariah. Millions of voices denounced him in unison, attributing to him views which he had never held, demanding his destruction. He was misunderstood, but completely powerless to remedy the situation, for it was Mao Zedong, not he, who controlled the context of interpretation. Shunned by his friends, a source of humiliation and terror to his family, Deng Tuo would lead a life of torture until Mao or his successors decided that Yao Wenyuan's assumptions should be abandoned. He would not live to experience that release, for only eight days after the publication of Yao's article he was dead - perhaps driven to suicide, perhaps murdered, and only the first to die when left guilty and defenceless by a cruel switch in the context of interpretation during Mao's Cultural Revolution.

3.5 Mao's Third Shift in the Context of Interpretation: Nie Yuanzi's Big Character Poster

By late May 1966, Mao was on the brink of bringing to a formal conclusion the rout of his enemies in the Beijing Party Committee, the central Propaganda Department and the Ministry of Culture. He was also in a position to widen his attack to the education system, which was especially vulnerable for three reasons. First, it overlapped with the cultural sphere, so extension of the Cultural Revolution to educational institutions would cause neither surprise nor great alarm amongst senior Party leaders. Indeed, the directive written by Jiang Qing which Mao had forced through the Central

Committee on 16 May had listed education, without emphasis, amongst the fields in which criticism should occur. Second, the students had already been extensively mobilized by the Party during the campaign against 'Three-Family Village', and at a signal from Mao they could easily be directed to search for 'Black Gangs' in the schools and universities. Third, the education sector had been heavily influenced by Peng Zhen and his associates in 1961-2, adopting policies which emphasised academic performance. Mao had gone along with these at the time but he now regarded them as anti-socialist.

In opening his attack on the education system, Mao again took care not to alarm the bulk of the Party's leaders, lest they unite against him while they still had sufficient strength. So he acted circuitously, making Beijing University his initial target. That institution had three characteristics which made it vulnerable. First, it was closely linked with the doomed Beijing Party Committee. Second, its president Lu Ping was an old comrade of Peng Zhen who 'had come to see the university as a place for academic study rather than political struggle' and had blocked criticism of Wu Han early in 1966 (Goldman 1981, 134). Third, it had a number of radicals on its staff led by Nie Yuanzi, the Party secretary in the Philosophy Department, a radical with a record of conflict with senior professors and the university administration. She had long been demanding that the university place more emphasis on political ideology, and in 1964 Lu Ping had incarcerated her in a Beijing hotel for seven months while she was interrogated about her activities (Goldman 1981, 134). She was the staff member who had tried to organize criticism of Wu Han, and she was perfect bait for the trap which Mao intended to set for Lu Ping.

It was Kang Sheng's wife, Cao Yiou, who sought out Nie Yuanzi, encouraging her and a group of radical associates to prepare a wall poster which linked the university's administration to Peng Zhen and accused its Party Committee of suppressing the Cultural Revolution. Some sources state that Cao Yiou even helped Nie Yuanzi and her allies to write the poster (Kwong 1988, 6). When the poster went up, Lu Ping did not guess that Mao's intimates were behind it, and after consulting the new secretary of the Beijing Party Committee he had it torn down and organized mass criticism of Nie Yuanzi and her cohorts. He had reacted exactly as his past suggested he would and fallen into the trap. Now all Mao had to do was change the context of interpretation so that Niche's poster ceased to be an attack on the

authority of the Party committee and became instead a revolutionary act challenging a 'Black Gang' opposed to the Cultural Revolution. Mao simply telephoned Kang Sheng and ordered him to publicize the poster with official support. That night, Kang Sheng read out the entire poster on the radio, then the following day it was published in the *People's Daily* with commentaries explaining its implications. Everyone now knew that the poster had Mao's blessing. So for the third time in the Cultural Revolution, Mao had used his unchallengeable authority to 'frame' his victim by changing the context of interpretation. Lu Ping's fate was sealed, as was that of the entire Beijing university administration, the university's Party Committee and all the staff and students who had criticized Nie Yuanzi.

But the ramifications of Mao's switch in the context of interpretation were much wider. Because Mao had endorsed it, Nie Yuanzi's poster was taken as proof that 'Black Gangs' had infiltrated to the very highest level within the country's educational institutions, and with the newspapers' encouragement students elsewhere began to scrutinize their teachers, administrators and Party committees. The affair also appears to have been the signal for the final stage in the purge of the Beijing Party organization. The day after the poster was published, Peng Zhen was formally dismissed and the Beijing Party Committee was re-organized, packed with Maoists. Four days later, *Frontline*, the Party Committee's theoretical journal which Deng Tuo had edited, was closed down, and the editors of Beijing's two newspapers were replaced. Mao had completed his conquest of China's capital.

3.6 Putting the New Interpretive Assumptions to Work in the Schools and Universities

The students who were to be the spearhead of Mao's Cultural Revolution were taught Yao's six interpretive assumptions during the campaign against the writers associated with 'Three-Family Village'. Day after day they heard their teachers recite official condemnations of the 'Gangster Inn'; day after day they studied newspaper commentaries by Yao Wenyuan and others on the 'poisonous weeds' composed by Deng Tuo and his colleagues; day after day they competed to see who could paint the largest number of big character posters reviling the 'black gang' which had infiltrated the country's cultural elite. But most took some time to become proficient at

using Yao's six interpretive assumptions and develop the required sensitivity to allegorical attacks on Mao, the Party and socialism. Gao Yuan, for example, recalls in his autobiography that at first he found Deng Tuo's essays 'witty and engrossing, so I needed the newspaper commentary to help me understand what was wrong with them.' Without such assistance, he would never have guessed that an essay on the benefits of drinking plain, boiled water was 'a smear on the Party's economic policies.' (Gao 1987, 36). But after weeks of study and weeks of writing big character posters (*dazibao*) condemning 'Three-Family Village', he and his classmates learned how to seek out Mao's enemies themselves. He describes how the breakthrough came when they cracked the anti-revolutionary code on the cover of the May 1966 issue of *China Youth*, the official magazine of the Communist Youth League:

> One afternoon when we were making dazibao, Little Mihu came running into the classroom waving a magazine and shouting, "Big discovery, big discovery!" ... He jabbed his figure at the back cover, a scene of young people carrying bundles of wheat in baskets slung on long poles. Behind them stretched a golden ocean of wheat.
>
> "Look at the red flag in the background," Little Mihu said excitedly. "It's fluttering toward the right. On the map, right is east and left is west. So the wind must be blowing from the west. Chairman Mao says the east wind should prevail over the west, but here the west is prevailing over the east!"
>
> That was not all. Little Mihu turned the back cover sideways and traced his finger through the wheatfield, pointing out some light-coloured streaks. "Here are four characters, do you see?" "Oh my!" somebody gasped. "Long live Kai-shek!" I saw it too, the veiled message in praise of Kuomintang leader Chiang Kai-shek. The magazine passed from hand to hand. We were shocked that the enemies of socialism would be so bold as to issue a public challenge and amazed that they had figured out such a clever way to do it. Now we understood why the newspapers were warning us that counterrevolutionaries had wormed their way into the very heart of the Party's cultural apparatus. Nothing could be taken for granted anymore. [Gao 1987, 39-40].

After that, said Gao Yuan, 'Everyone was on the lookout for fresh evidence, and every day fresh dazibao reported the latest findings.' Some thought that a shadow in the portrait of Lenin in the classroom was a snake running down the side of his nose; others believed that a painted beam above Mao's head in a photo was a 'sword' about to drop; and still others alleged that the portrait of Mao at the front of the classroom, which showed him facing

slightly to the right, was a deliberate attempt to make him appear deformed by showing only his left ear (Gao 1987, 40). None of these interpretations went unchallenged, but students who disputed them could seem to lack revolutionary consciousness. There was, as Anita Chan has pointed out in another context, 'a built-in momentum throughout the nation towards "ultra-leftism"' (Chan 1985, 95), and even the students who argued that Mao's missing ear was a matter of artistic realism were heavily outvoted.

As the search for revisionism spread, 'Nothing was immune from suspicion.' (Gao 1987, 40). Taking their cues from the newspapers, students scrutinized poems, short stories, novels, plays and movies. They began to put up *xiaozibao*, 'small character posters', on which they wrote essays exposing the counter-revolutionary content of works which they had hitherto regarded as entirely innocent. Many of the essays imitated, quite deliberately, Yao Wenyuan's prose style and method of analysis. And, after the publication of Nie Yuanzi's poster on 2 June, they began to focus on the education system. Students began to look critically at textbooks and teaching methods, and at the attitudes, behaviour and backgrounds of the teachers themselves. Gao Yuan's English teacher, for example, was condemned for the following passage in an ode to the lotus which he published in a provincial literary magazine:

> Though rooted in stinking mud,
> Your body is smooth and clean;
> Though you drink bitter water all your life,
> Your flowers are fresh and fragrant;
> In summer, you please us with your beautiful blossoms;
> In autumn, you wither and leave us your delicious roots.

The students concluded that the phrase 'drink bitter water all your life' was 'a slur on socialist society' (Gao 1987, 42). The interpretation seems ludicrous, but it is easier to understand why the students should have advanced it when we remember that they had as a model the newspapers' attacks on Deng Tuo's essay about the virtues of plain, boiled water.

In choosing their victims, the students received little help from Nie Yuanzi's poster and the newspapers, for these sources of guidance simply inveighed against 'the "Black Gangs" who oppose Chairman Mao and his thought.' (Zhai 1992, 56). This left unanswered the crucial questions. Who

were the 'Black Gangs' in the educational institutions? And how could revolutionary staff and students identify the 'bourgeois academic authorities' and 'revisionists' said to be associated with them? These semantically incomplete terms could be assigned references only when fleshed out with the aid of contextual assumptions. This meant that a good deal of the responsibility for reference assignment lay with Mao's audience, for initially there was no firm guidance about which assumptions were relevant. Some students would regard as 'revisionist' anyone who valued academic excellence, others would apply the label to those with bad class origins, and still others would apply it to all Party committees which had carried out official Party policy by allowing only academic criticism of Wu Han before Mao demanded his head. Worst of all, 'class enemies' and people with grudges might use Yao's principles to make the 'revisionist' cap fit anyone at all, putting even the 'reddest' Party secretaries in danger. The result would be chaos, with malicious and uncontrolled criticism ruining the lives of many teachers, and perhaps even sweeping away school administrations and Party committees. To the Party leaders, such wholesale attacks must have seemed a danger, but Mao's shift of the responsibility for reference assignment onto his audience meant that the Party leaders had no way of knowing that such attacks were exactly what he wanted.

In many schools and universities, students began to put Yao Wenyuan's principles to work almost immediately after the publication of Nie Yuanzi's poster. Some teachers were condemned for a hitherto acceptable 'bourgeois' manner of dress, some for having emphasised academic subject matter at the expense of Mao Zedong's Thought, and some for having exercised 'bourgeois dictatorship' over students by reprimanding them. Others were accused simply because students feared that if they did not criticise their own teachers they would be suspected of lacking revolutionary consciousness (Zhai 1992, 63-4, 68-71). Many of the accusations were poorly supported, or were substantiated by free use of Yao Wenyuan's first principle of interpretation, that 'Chairman Mao's enemies often cunningly conceal their message in allegories and codes'. At Yunnan university, for example, students scrutinizing a linguistics text written by and 'old intellectual' decided that the sentence 'The sun is setting behind the hill' was an anti-revolutionary reference to the fall of Chairman Mao, who in revolutionary symbolism was the 'sun' in the Chinese people's hearts (Kwong 1988, 10).

Far worse, from the Party's point of view, was the fact that in some schools groups of students challenged the legitimacy of the Party committees. Sometimes these students were disgruntled or exceptionally radical individuals of red class background, but at other times they were the products of middle class or bad class families. Their attacks led many Party committees to defend themselves by mobilizing support from the main stream of Party members, Youth League members and the children of cadres. They also asked higher Party units to despatch work teams to manage the Cultural Revolution, arguing that it should not be turned into a counter-revolution by 'anti-Party' forces (Lee 1978, 27-31). In some schools and universities even the students, unsure of what they should be doing, asked for work teams to direct their efforts.

Uncertain of how to respond to the situation, Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping flew to see Mao, who was watching events from Hangzhou. They asked Mao to return to take charge of the Cultural Revolution but he refused, saying 'You do as you see fit' (Zhai 1992, 61). So they returned to Beijing, where an urgent meeting of the Politburo decided to send work teams to 'control the movement and maintain order in universities and schools.' Liu, anxious to avoid displeasing Mao, told him of the decision by telephone, and obtained his consent (Zhai 1992, 61). So from 5 June the central Party authorities despatched work teams to many schools and universities.

Once on the ground, the work teams faced the same problem of interpretation as the students. How could they identify the 'Black Gangs'? The criterion, obviously, was fidelity to Mao's thought, but Yao Wenyuan's six principles of interpretation made it possible for them to 'prove' that almost anyone was guilty of major infidelity, either overt or secret. But Mao and the Central Committee had repeatedly said that a large majority of the cadres were 'good' or 'relatively good', and he had stressed that the aim of any campaign should be to get 'more than 95 percent of our people and 95 percent of our cadres' to unite against the five percent who were attempting to restore capitalism - a view echoed repeatedly in Party documents (Jin 1995, 349; Baum & Teiwes 1968, 66, 73, 78, 84-5, 93, 111-12, 119, 123). And who were the obdurately anti-socialist five percent? Mao's standard answer was well known. In 1958, for example, he had summarized an oft-repeated view by saying:

> The unreformed landlords, rich peasants, counter-revolutionaries, bad elements, and Rightists resolutely oppose communism. They are the Chiang Kaishek and the Guomindang of the present day, they are the enemy class ... If you add up all these people, they come to roughly 5 percent of the population ... This is a hostile class, and still awaits reform. We must struggle against them ... If we succeed in transforming 10 percent of them, this can be accounted a success ... [Schram 1984, 38].

In 1962, Mao returned to the theme:

> Those whom the people's democratic dictatorship should repress are landlords, rich peasants, counter-revolutionary elements, bad elements and anti-communist Rightists. The classes which the counter-revolutionary elements, bad elements and anti-communist Rightists represent are the landlord class and the reactionary bourgeoisie. These classes and bad people comprise about four or five percent of the population. [Schram 1984, 4].

So for Mao, the five percent or so of the population who were bent on restoring capitalism were mainly the 'five black categories' and in some contexts the 'reactionary bourgeoisie' - unrefomed capitalists - as well. Mao's views on this matter were firmly lodged in the officially cultivated cognitive environment of the Chinese people, for his speeches were read carefully by all Party members and were set for study by the entire population. Even the illiterate heard his words when they were broadcast or read aloud, and their implications were frequently explained. Moreover, Mao's message about the most appropriate targets had been driven home by social practice, for everyone had seen the 'five blacks' and many former capitalists hauled out regularly for criticism during previous campaigns and struggle meetings. So the well-rehearsed principles of Mao Zedong's Thought ensured that the *People's Daily*'s call for a war against the 'Black Gangs' was taken as the signal for a campaign directed largely at the 'five black categories' and the 'reactionary bourgeoisie'. In this way Mao himself bore direct responsibility for our seventh principle of interpretation, which we can add to the six assumptions which I have extracted from the work of Yao Wenyuan:

7. *Anything said or written by people who are from bad class backgrounds is particularly likely to express reactionary sentiments.*

In accordance with this principle, the work teams sought the cooperation of students and teachers from red class backgrounds and 'pointed the arrow downwards' towards the five black categories and the bourgeoisie. At Ken Ling's school, for instance, the work team made public the files of teachers who had 'historical problems' such as past connections with the Guomindang, then told the students 'Let's see what stand you take.' About forty or fifty of the schools' 187 staff were rounded up, harangued, humiliated and tortured. The class background of their tormentors was clear:

> Those who immediately took up sticks and applied the tortures were the school bullies who, as children of party cadres and army officers, belonged to the five red classes ... Coarse and cruel, they were accustomed to throwing their parents' weight around and brawling with other students. They did so poorly at school that they were about to be expelled and, presumably, resented the teachers because of this. [Ling 1972, 19].

In most schools, as in Ling's, the attack was led by the children of cadres. They saw themselves as a superior stratum, as the natural heirs to the communist revolution, and they were accustomed to taking the lead in political matters. They were given privileged admission to the best schools and universities, but as a group they got worse results than the academically more committed children of the 'bad classes' and the middle classes - especially the intellectual middle class. They often resented teachers who tried to get them to work hard or who criticised their lapses from revolutionary virtue, especially when the teachers were not party members or had dubious family backgrounds. They took pleasure in proving their revolutionary spirit by using Yao Wenyuan's interpretive assumptions to 'prove' that such teachers held anti-revolutionary views and that they glorified academic excellence at the expense of redness (Chan 1985, 126, 135; Unger 1982, 105, 111-16). They were often supported by politically active middle class children, anxious to prove that they were 'red' in their hearts if not in their ambiguous family heritage, and by the children of workers and peasants. At my own university and its attached schools, the staff suffered most at the hands of the children of workers who lived in the university village, where they performed maintenance and other tasks. In a highly competitive environment dominated by the sons and daughters of middle class or bad class academics, working class children had always felt inferior, and now they got their revenge.

In this context, our seventh interpretive assumption - that bad-class people are especially likely to express reactionary sentiments - was activated time after time to guide the interpretation of texts and utterances. In Gao Yuan's school, for instance, the deputy-principal, Lin Sheng, was the son of a landlord, and a book of essays which he had written was singled out for special criticism. In one essay he recalled how his father had set him on the path of learning, but the students twisted his words to accuse him of bragging about his landlord origins. 'In the old society,' they said, 'old people from the exploiting class, like Lin Sheng, could afford to go to school. How many workers or poor or lower-middle peasants went to school? Most of them could not even dream of such a thing!' (Gao 1987, 56). Gao Yuan himself 'rather liked' Lin Sheng's writing, but felt no urge to dispute the analysis of its reactionary nature. 'The mere fact that Lin Sheng was the son of a landlord', he said, 'was incriminating enough.' (Gao 1987, 56). The influence of our seventh assumption could hardly have been more clearly manifested.

The situation of members of the bad classes, which had always been wretched, became even worse during early stages of the Cultural Revolution as the cadres' children sought to entrench their position as leaders of the Revolution by elaborating the doctrine of 'natural redness' (*zilai hong*). This doctrine stated that children from red-class families were natural revolutionaries, while those from bad-class families were natural reactionaries. This would continue from generation to generation. Well known verses with which red-class children taunted their inferiors made the point:

> A dragon begets only dragons,
> A phoenix begets only phoenixes,
> A rat's descendant knows only how to dig holes.
> A hero's child is a brave man,
> A reactionary's child is a bastard.
> [Gao 1987, 113; Zhai 1992, 79-82; Chan 1985, 133-36].

These verses were not Maoist orthodoxy, for they neglected Mao's insistence that people could sometimes change their attitudes. Instead, they isolated and took to an extreme Mao's favouritism towards the red categories and his mistrust of people with bad-class origin. They envisaged a China divided forever into hereditary 'good' and 'bad' castes, and they had profound implications for the interpretation of the relationship between the

meaning of statements made by bad-class people and the opinions which such people actually held. Indeed, they embodied something far stronger than the mistrust of the bad classes which we found expressed in interpretive assumption seven. What they implied was the dogmatic universalism of assumption eight:

8. *People with bad class origins are incapable of genuine revolutionary consciousness.*

This assumption made it impossible for people with bad class backgrounds to get a hearing. No words which they used could communicate their inner conviction that they were committed revolutionaries or persuade their red-class tormentors that they had seen the error of their ways. We shall see in the next chapter that this had profound implications for their treatment at the hands of Red Guards from the 'good' classes during the Cultural Revolution.

If the red-class students began by humiliating, beating and torturing teachers with dubious backgrounds, they soon began to look for other targets. The most obvious were fellow students who were unpopular or who were suspected of counter-revolutionary sentiments - and again this generally meant those with bad class backgrounds. In many schools, these 'Sons of Bitches' were forced to study the works of Chairman Mao while being harassed by bullying supervisors, they were forced to make repeated self-confessions, and they were compelled to denounce their parents incessantly. They were also sometimes beaten or given a 'yin-yang head' with the hair shaved off one side to signify their outcast status. This 'Red Terror', as those who carried it out proudly termed it, was supported by the Party's work teams, which sometimes gave the cadres' children access to the official dossiers on bad-class students. (Chan 1985, 134-6; Lee 1978, 57-8; Zhai 1992, 104-9, 116-17).

In attacking the 'class enemy' in the schools, most students from the red classes were completely confident that they were doing what Mao wanted. The work teams and the Party leaders, for their part, were doing their best to interpret his will. Mao had made their task a formidable one by refusing to take charge himself or to give direct instructions. Moreover, he had always described the Cultural Revolution's targets using semantically incomplete terms like 'Black Gangs', 'revisionists' and 'representatives of the

bourgeoisie'. Dissident students and staff who saw these terms as referring primarily to school or university administrations and Party committees were interpreting Mao's words using assumptions which to other students and staff seemed utterly perverse. For most, the obvious context of interpretation was provided by Mao's own writings, which unambiguously identified members of the bad classes as the principal targets. So in 'pointing the arrow downwards', the Party and the work teams were not merely deflecting the attack from themselves, but acting upon a sincere and entirely predictable interpretation of Mao's will.

3.7 Mao's Fourth Switch in the Context of Interpretation: Entrapping Liu Shaoqi and Declaring War on the Party

Within the Communist Party, everyone knew that Mao wanted to root out 'powerholders within the Party following the capitalist road'. Indeed, middle and higher level cadres had seen a directive from the Central Committee dated 16 May 1966, written by Jiang Qing in accordance with Mao's instructions, which said that it would be necessary to criticise 'representative of the bourgeoisie who have sneaked into the Party' in order to purify the cultural, intellectual and educational spheres (*CCP Documents*, 27-8). This was neither new nor particularly alarming, for the detection of such people had been a goal of the Socialist Education Movement since January 1965 (Baum 1975, 128-9). Most cadres probably thought that the directive implied only a limited purge of people associated with Peng Zhen, the central Propaganda Department and the cultural sphere, for they took for granted Mao's dictum that most members of the Party were 'good' or 'comparatively good'. And, since most had red class backgrounds, they did not dream that they were the intended object of a campaign against 'representatives of the bourgeoisie'. Mao's class prejudices were well known, and in 1963 he had explicitly identified the 'bad people' who had 'wormed their way' into the Party as unregenerate members of the petty bourgeoisie, intellectuals and the 'sons and daughters of landlords and rich peasants.' (Quoted in Schram 1984, 45).

One person who seemed to have no immediate cause for worry was Liu Shaoqi. Since January 1965, we have seen, Mao had been plotting his downfall, but Liu as yet knew nothing of it. He remained Mao's deputy and heir-apparent, the Maoist-controlled media continued to give him

favourable publicity, and Mao had placed him in charge of the Cultural Revolution and approved his decision to send the work teams into the schools and universities (Baum 1975, 200 n.84; Zhai 1992, 55, 61, 66-7). Moreover, he had directed the Revolution at precisely those people whom Mao himself had previously identified as the main source of danger.

Liu's world began to fall apart only on 18 July when Mao, who had been observing his conduct of the Cultural Revolution from Hangzhou, returned to Beijing to spring his trap. He did to Liu what he had done to Deng Tuo, Peng Zhen, Lu Ping and all his previous victims: he introduced a new principle of interpretation which transformed Liu's attempt to *promote* the socialist revolution into an attempt to *suppress* it. Mao had stood by while Liu, in accordance with established Party policy and a totally predictable reading of his leader's wishes, had used the work teams to direct the Cultural Revolution against intellectuals and people with bad class backgrounds. He had stood by while Liu, to prevent malcontents and 'Rightists' from causing havoc by using Yao Wenyuan's interpretive principles to attack good Party members, had authorized the suppression of criticism which seemed unjustified or which challenged the authority of the Party. Now, however, Mao returned to Beijing in a fury, telling Liu that the main goal of the Cultural Revolution was not, as he had thought, the purification of the intellectual, educational and cultural spheres, but the destruction of the 'capitalist roaders' in the Party. He accused Liu of using the work teams to prevent criticism of the Party and to suppress the Cultural Revolution. And he introduced three new interpretive assumptions designed to discredit Liu, destroy his power and turn the Cultural Revolution against the Party.

Mao made the new assumptions public through three measures. First, dismissing Liu's protests, he withdrew the work teams from the schools and universities. Second, he himself wrote a big character poster for Beijing University under the title 'Bombard the Headquarters', criticizing the work teams and saying that 'some leading comrades ... have enforced a bourgeois dictatorship and struck down the surging movement of the great cultural revolution of the proletariat.' (Lee 1978, 65). Third, after a fierce debate, he narrowly persuaded the Central Committee to adopt his famous 'Sixteen Points' which declared openly that 'The main target of the present movement is those within the Party who are in authority and are taking the capitalist road.' The document said that such people 'are extremely afraid of being exposed by the masses and therefore seek every possible pretext to

suppress the mass movement'; and it accused them of 'shifting the targets for attack and turning black into white in an attempt to lead the movement astray.' (*CCP Documents*, 44-6). The document called for their dismissal. And, while it did not identify them by name, references to the work teams' 'counter-attacks against the masses' left no doubt that the principal capitalist roaders were Liu, Deng and the other Party leaders whom Mao had charged with supervising the Cultural Revolution.

Mao's actions were intended to communicate three very definite assumptions which were designed to influence the interpretation of what members of the Communist Party said and did. One of these, the ninth in our series, can be stated as follows:

9. *Anyone who fears, criticises or suppresses the free mobilization of the masses is opposing the Cultural Revolution, attacking socialism and following the capitalist road.*

So when the Party, advancing the slogan 'Sweep out all obstacles to the Cultural Revolution', attacked dissident students as 'freaks and monsters' (Lee 1978, 29), it was not defending the Cultural Revolution but suppressing it. The tenth assumption was equally damaging:

10. *Anyone who fails to make capitalist roaders within the Party the main target is guilty of 'shifting the target of attack' and following the capitalist road.*

This assumption ensured that through their words and actions Liu, Deng and almost the entire Party stood accused. They had made many statements which directed the students' attack towards the 'usual suspects' – 'bourgeois intellectuals' and members of the bad classes – and in doing this they were seeking to guide the Cultural Revolution in the direction which they thought Mao favoured. Now, however, their words were to be reinterpreted as an attempt to shift the target of attack.

Mao must have expected that Liu and the other Party leaders would interpret his calls for them to expose the 'Black Gangs' in the context of the readily accessible assumptions which he had drilled into them over many years. Now they were left guilty and helpless, for Mao with his immense authority had suddenly declared those assumptions outmoded. And while

in inner Party conclaves, fighting for their lives, they might argue furiously with Mao that his sudden shift of assumptions was monstrously unfair, they had no public voice because the Maoists had gained total control of the media in their purges of the central Propaganda Department and the Beijing Party Committee. Moreover, had Liu or others opposed Mao in public, they would have been swept away, for their efforts to promote the image of their Great Leader had worked only too well. The worship of Mao's Thought which Lin Biao had orchestrated in the period immediately preceding the Cultural Revolution had merely put the finishing touches to his leader's god-like status as the sole source of the Party's legitimacy.

Mao's deification meant that the 'Sixteen Points' and the newspapers were able to assume and assert our eleventh interpretive principle:

11. *The legitimacy of the Communist Party derives entirely from its faithfulness to the Thought of Chairman Mao Zedong, and Party members who say anything at variance with that Thought are attacking socialism and following the capitalist road.*

To give people plenty of opportunity to use this interpretive principle, the Sixteen Points confined the Party's role in supervising the Cultural Revolution largely to encouraging criticism of its own record in the light of Mao Zedong's Thought. The document exhorted the Party 'to arouse the masses boldly', encouraging criticism of 'the shortcomings and errors in the work of the persons in charge'. In this way the Party would put 'proletarian politics in the forefront and Mao Zedong's thought in the lead.' (*CCP Documents*, 44). Mao undoubtedly intended the masses' criticism to result in the dismissal of people like Liu Shaoqi whom he thought had led the Party astray. He also intended to give the whole Party a shock, intimidating it into stricter conformity with his Thought. More than that, he seemed determined to reduce the Party's power on a longer term basis, making it responsive to elected 'cultural revolutionary groups, committees and congresses', modelled on the Paris Commune. These were not to be 'temporary organizations but permanent, standing mass organizations.' (*CCP Documents*, 49-50). At the same time, the 'masses' who were to sit in judgement on the Party were to elect revolutionary committees and congresses, responsive to their will, based on the model of the Paris Commune. These new institutions were to be a permanent feature of Chinese society (*CCP Documents*, 44, 49-50, 53-4). Mao, it seemed, was going

to put the Communist Party for ever more under the watchful eye of institutions subservient to the revolutionary people. So while Mao did not intend to destroy the Party, by commanding it to submit itself to the judgement of the 'revolutionary masses' he was taking away its power, humiliating it and exposing it to devastating criticism. For when the masses sat in judgment, there seemed to be little doubt of the verdict. By successive switches of the interpretive context Mao had framed his own Party, and this should have ensured that the words and actions of loyal cadres would inevitably be construed as anti-socialist. The only Party members who could have any confidence that they would be found innocent were those who had betrayed the Party and conspired against it in Mao's name: Lin Biao, Kang Sheng, Jiang Qing and their followers. Or that, at any rate, was Mao's plan. It did not happen at first, because the red-class students who at that stage led the agitation mostly misinterpreted his message. For the first time in the Cultural Revolution, but by no means the last, Mao lost control of the context of interpretation.

3.8 Rogue Assumptions in the Context of Interpretation: the Red-Class Red Guards Misread Mao's Message

Liu Shaoqi and other Party leaders had no doubt that Mao was installing the revolutionary masses as judge and jury in the case of Chinese Communist Party *vs.* Mao Zedong, and they had little doubt of the verdict. Liu reportedly fought bitterly against his fate, repudiating Mao's criticisms and declaring that 'he was not afraid of the five consequences - dismissal, expulsion, divorce by his wife, imprisonment, or being beheaded.' (Lee 1978, 65). He saw the 'Sixteen Points' for what they were: an indictment of the Party's leadership of the Cultural Revolution and a call to the masses to bring in a guilty verdict and deliver judgment. He must have been surprised that at first those who dominated the mass movement did no such thing. Instead, they continued to 'point the arrow downwards' towards the 'bourgeois intellectuals' and the bad classes. In order to understand why this happened, we must examine the class background of the dominant faction of revolutionary students, for that background gave rise to the assumptions which led them to misinterpret Mao's message.

The mass movement in August and September was based on university and secondary school students, dominated by the red classes.

The red-class students considered themselves the natural leaders of any revolutionary movement, and they were accepted as such by students of middle class and bad class backgrounds. Most had been courted by the school Party committees, and the work teams had sought them out to seek their co-operation. Then in early August 1966, they were the ones whom the Party encouraged to form first Red Guard units in Beijing. Their example was soon followed by students in other centres, and again membership was confined to the red classes. Almost invariably, their leaders were the children of cadres, often high ranking ones. Middle class students, although often desperate to join, were relegated to the status of hangers-on in what was called the Red Outer Circle, while bad-class students continued their customary roles as victims and class enemies (Chan 1985, 132-3; Unger 1982, 118-21; Lee 1978, 85-6, 101).

It is undoubtedly true that many of these students would have been reluctant to lead a revolution against their own families if they had thought that was what Mao wanted. There is, however, convincing evidence that very few of them interpreted his call for them to 'Bombard the Headquarters' in this way. Accounts of those who observed the Cultural Revolution and the recollections of those who participated in the mass movement are unanimous that in this period the Red Guards worshipped Mao and were desperate to know and carry out his wishes. There is not the slightest indication that they felt torn between the desire to do his will and the desire to defend their families. When the children of cadres ignored the Party and continued to attack intellectuals and members of the bad classes, they were convinced that they were doing Mao's will. It was a clear case of misinterpretation, and one which Relevance Theory can elucidate.

As Sperber and Wilson (1995) stress, communication does not succeeded when members of the audience simply recognize the linguistic meaning of an utterance. Rather, it succeeds when they infer the speakers' meaning from the linguistic meaning - when they recover the speaker's communicative intention. And, in inferring the speaker's meaning from an utterance, the audience makes use of precisely those interpretive assumptions which maximize relevance - those which maximize positive cognitive effects (additions to knowledge) and minimize processing effort. It is the responsibility of the speaker to make correct judgments about the accessibility of contextual assumptions to her audience and to choose exactly those words which (in accordance with the principle of relevance)

will bring to the hearer's mind the assumptions required for the recovery of the speaker's meaning. As Sperber and Wilson (1995, 43) put it:

> It is left to the communicator to make correct assumptions about the codes and contextual information that the audience will have accessible and be likely to use in the comprehension process. The responsibility for avoiding misunderstanding also lies with the speaker, so that all the hearer has to do is go ahead and use whatever code and contextual information come most easily to hand.

When speakers or writers are mistaken about which assumptions are most accessible to their audience, misinterpretation or incomprehension occur. This was Mao's problem with the red-class Red Guards whom he hoped would carry the attack against the Party as he had urged in the 'Sixteen Points'. He made incorrect assumptions about the contextual information most accessible to them. Indeed, at several stages in the 'Sixteen Points' he activated precisely the assumptions which would lead to misunderstanding, making these 'rogue' assumptions even more accessible and ensuring the misinterpretation of his message.

When Mao called on the 'revolutionary masses' to make 'those in authority who are travelling the capitalist road' the main target of the Cultural Revolution, there is no doubt that the Red Guards understood the *linguistic* meaning of his appeal. What most failed to do was recover the *speaker's meaning*. This was because the assumption which Mao was attempting to convey produced no positive cognitive effects. It thereby never became relevant and was never recognised as Mao's intended meaning. Most Red Guards simply did not understand that he wanted them to attack prominent members of the Party and demand the heads of Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping and the work teams.

In order to understand how this happened, let us recall the three ways in which an assumption which a speaker intends to convey may have positive cognitive effects and hence achieve relevance:

I. It may provide further evidence for, and hence strengthen, an existing assumption which is not already regarded as certain.

II. Having been accepted as true, it may be combined with existing assumptions to produce contextual implications.

III. It may contradict an existing assumption, displacing it in whole or in part (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 108-54).

The assumption which Mao intended to convey produced no positive cognitive effects because it contradicted assumptions which the Red Guards already held as almost certain on Mao's own authority. These assumptions were so deeply entrenched that it was impossible for most Red Guards to believe that what Mao *said* was what he *meant*. So they attributed to him a meaning consistent with their existing assumptions. The most important of these were:

1. That the Party, except for a small minority of perhaps five percent, fervently supports socialism, the Cultural Revolution and the Thought of Mao Zedong.

2. The main opposition to socialism, to the Cultural Revolution and to the Thought of Mao Zedong comes from bourgeois intellectuals and especially from the bad classes.

These assumptions had guided the behaviour of most red class students during the early phases of the Cultural Revolution, and they were held with utter conviction. So when the 'Sixteen Points', with Mao's authority, proclaimed that 'The main task of the present movement is those within the Party who are in authority and taking the capitalist road', most Red Guards were in a dilemma. The purportedly factual assumption implicit in this injunction and in the rhetoric which surrounded it was as follows:

3. The main danger to socialism, to the Cultural Revolution and to the Thought of Mao Zedong comes from the Party, not from bourgeois intellectuals and the bad classes.

Assumption 3 clearly contradicted assumptions 1 and 2. For Party leaders like Liu Shaoqi, there was no problem of interpretation here. They were all too well aware of Mao's fallibility and simply rejected assumption 3 and the injunction associated with it: Mao's message had no positive cognitive effects and was irrelevant. What he did communicate to Liu and his allies were two related assumptions: 'Mao is *saying* that we are the main danger to socialism' and 'Mao is *saying* that we are the main target of the Cultural Revolution'. These assumptions had enormous positive cognitive effects

and they required little processing effort. They were therefore highly relevant and quickly grasped as the speaker's meaning.

For most red-class students, interpretation was not so simple. They held assumptions 1 and 2 as virtually certain, and because of this they could not accept assumption 3. Their problem was that, unlike Liu, they regarded Mao as virtually infallible. They could resolve the dilemma only by denying, to themselves and to others, that Mao was trying to communicate assumption 3 and its associated injunction. They simply could not attribute to Mao a view which they were convinced was wrong. So they understood the 'Sixteen Points' with the aid of interpretive assumptions from which they derived explicatures and implicatures consistent with assumptions 1 and 2 and totally inconsistent with assumption 3. Indeed, some of those interpretive assumptions were reiterated and thereby made more accessible by the 'Sixteen Points'. I cite the main ones as assumptions 4-6, quoting the words from the 'Sixteen Points' which expressed them. The first two of those assumptions are as follows:

4. The 'great majority' of cadres are, in ordinary situations, 'good' and 'comparatively good'. They include only a 'small number of anti-Party, anti-socialist Rightists.' (*CCP Documents*, 48-9).

5. The aim of the Cultural Revolution should be to strike only at 'the handful of ultra-reactionary bourgeois Rightists and counter-revolutionary revisionists' and to 'achieve the unity of more than 95 per cent of the cadres and more than 95 percent of the masses.' (*CCP Documents* 1968, 46).

We shall see later how these assumptions were used to derive explicatures and implicatures which supported the red-class students' misinterpretation of Mao's message.

The 'Sixteen Points' also conveyed assumptions which could be taken to indicate that the 'anti-Party, anti-socialist Rightists' were to be found mainly where they had always been detected in the past: in the ranks of the bad classes. Take assumption 6:

6. 'The masses of the workers, peasants, soldiers, revolutionary intellectuals and revolutionary cadres form the main force in this great cultural revolution.' (*CCP Documents*, 43).

So the 'masses' whom Mao named as his allies in carrying forward the Cultural Revolution were not the Chinese people as a whole, but the *red classes*, with the sole addition of 'revolutionary intellectuals' like Yao Wenyuan. And those red classes included 'revolutionary cadres'. From this the red-class students could derive implicatures as follows:

Implicature I:

(a) 'Revolutionary cadres' are a major force in carrying through the Cultural Revolution. (Entailed by assumption 6).

(b) The vast majority of cadres are revolutionary. (A standard Maoist assumption, expressed in the 'Sixteen Points' as assumptions 4 and 5 above)).

(c) Therefore the cadres must be regarded far more as supporters of the Cultural Revolution than as its targets.

Implicature II:

(a) The red classes and revolutionary intellectuals are the 'main force' of the Cultural Revolution. (Assumption 6).

(b) It would be perversely paradoxical to identify as the 'main force' of the Cultural Revolution the classes which contain most of the 'anti-Party, anti-socialist Rightists' who are its targets.

(c) Official Communist Party documents are not given to perverse paradox.

(d) Therefore the targets of the Cultural Revolution must come largely from the other classes - the middle and bad classes.

These two implicatures, so congenial to the class prejudices of red-class students and so consistent with Mao's previous pronouncements, combined

to convince them that Mao did not intend them to start putting up banners denouncing the work teams and the Party leaders who had sent them into the schools. Indeed, they were able to derive a further implicature from the 'Sixteen Points' which justified their lack of action:

Implicature III:

(a) 'In *certain* schools, units and work teams of the cultural revolution, *some* of the persons in charge have organized counter-attacks against the masses who put up big-character posters against them.' ('Sixteen Points', *CCP Documents*, 48, emphasis added).

(b) This entails that there were schools, units and work teams where the persons in charge did *not* organize counter-attacks against the masses.

(c) In our school, the persons repressed were not members of the masses, but counter-revolutionaries drawn from or allied with the bad classes.

(c) Therefore the 'persons in charge' in our school, unit or work team safeguarded the Cultural Revolution, did not suppress it, and should not be made the target of attack.

As far as higher Party leaders were concerned, the red-class Red Guards were able to derive the following implicature from the 'Sixteen Points':

Implicature IV:

(a) 'The main target of the present movement is those within the Party who are in authority and are taking the capitalist road.' ('Sixteen Points', *CCP Documents*, 46).

(b) The Party contains only a 'small number of anti-Party, anti-socialist Rightists'. (From assumption 4 above).

(c) Peng Zhen, the Beijing Party Committee, the central Propaganda Department, the Ministry of Culture, as well as many editors of Party newspapers and intellectuals, have already been exposed, attacked and dismissed.

(d) Hence the number already exposed is already a rather large 'small number'.

(e) Therefore capitalist roaders in the Party who have not yet been exposed must be few in number.

The 'Sixteen Points' also served to direct Red Guards with a standard 'red class' context of interpretation away from the Party in other ways. Take, for example, the following extract:

> Large numbers of revolutionary young people, previously unknown, have become courageous and daring pathbreakers ... their main orientation has been correct from the beginning ... It is the main direction along which the great proletarian cultural revolution continues to advance. [*CCP Documents*, 43].

The difficulty with this passage is that the term 'revolutionary young people' is semantically incomplete. It can be assigned a reference only with the aid of contextual assumptions. So students whose protests against the Party committees had been crushed by the work teams, reading it in the context of Mao's criticism of the work teams, interpreted it as a vindication of their orientation. But other 'revolutionary young people', who dominated the movement in the schools and cooperated with the work teams, did not read it that way. They interpreted the statement in the light of assumptions (a) and (b) to infer the explicature in (c):

(a) We are young, and everyone recognizes that we are revolutionary because of our red class origins, our ideology and our actions.

(b) We have dominated the activities of young people throughout the Cultural Revolution, and the 'Sixteen Points' often praise and never criticize those activities.

(c) Therefore *we* are the 'revolutionary young people' whose orientation is praised by the 'Sixteen Points' as 'correct from the beginning'.

Having thus developed the semantically incomplete term 'revolutionary young people' into an explicature with themselves as its referent, they were

in a position to combine assumption (c) with assumption (d) to derive the implicature in (e):

(d) Our revolutionary orientation has been directed primarily towards attacking 'bourgeois intellectuals' and members of the bad classes.

(e) Therefore, according to the 'Sixteen Points', the Cultural Revolution should be directed primarily against 'bourgeois intellectuals' and the bad classes.

Mao's approval of the Red Guards' orientation seemed to be confirmed at a rally in Tiananmen Square on 18 August when he allowed a young Red Guard to pin a red arm band - the insignia of the Red Guards - to his sleeve. By doing so, he symbolically accepted leadership of the movement and seemed to give his blessing to its past and present direction. At the same rally Mao's new deputy, Lin Biao, seemed to legitimize 'pointing the arrow downwards' when he placed less emphasis on rooting out capitalist roaders in the Party than on destroying the Four Olds:

> We will vigorously destroy all the old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits of the exploiting classes ... We will sweep away all vermin and remove all obstacles!
>
> We will make vigorous efforts to establish proletarian authorities and the new ideas, new culture, new customs and new habits of the proletariat. [Lin 1966, 377].

The campaign against the Four Olds, which reflected the Maoist assumption that a revolution in ideology could transform society, had been articulated in the *People's Daily* on 8 June 1966 and reiterated in the 'Sixteen Points'. Now, with Lin Biao's appeal ringing in their ears, the Red Guards picked up the message and transformed it into a mass movement which absorbed most of their energies. Unlike the call to focus on capitalist roaders in the Party, Lin's message was highly relevant, for it was consistent with easily accessible existing assumptions and could be combined with them to form implicatures suggesting a wide range of very congenial targets for attack. All of these targets were located, not in the Party which had been trying to create a New Society, but amongst the classes left over from the old society. So 'bourgeois intellectuals' and the bad classes were again victimized. And naturally enough, the Red Guards were assisted by the Party organization, which took the opportunity to divert attention from itself and supplied lists

of bad-class people in every neighbourhood. The result was a devastating extension of the Red Terror, in which the Red Guards entered the homes of bad-class people, seizing 'old' books - which meant in effect almost everything apart from the works of Mao, Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Lu Xun (whom Mao had praised). The Red Guards also seized or destroyed furniture, ornaments, musical instruments and anything else which could be labelled 'bourgeois'. Consumed with hatred of the class enemy, they vandalized temples and monuments, ransacked libraries and interrogated, humiliated, assaulted, tortured and sometimes killed their victims. They even tried to drive all members of the 'four black categories' out of Beijing into labour camps in the countryside, so that they would no longer contaminate the nation's capital (Zhai 1992, 91-100; Lee 1978, 86-90).

In all of this, the Red Guards were doing what they thought Mao wanted. They were right, of course, up to a point, for he did want them to wage class war against the Four Olds; but they were wrong in thinking that he wanted them to make the campaign against the Four Olds a substitute for what he had tried to designate as their main task - the denunciation of capitalist roaders in the Party. Within a few weeks, Mao and his allies realized that for the first time the Cultural Revolution had gone off course, and from the beginning of October they set about changing its orientation. The *People's Daily* and *Red Flag* accused capitalist roaders within the Party of manipulating the campaign to divert attention from themselves to the masses, attacking Red Guards who had cooperated in this strategy. They also banned use of the term 'black categories' and denounced the theory of 'natural redness', describing the speeches of the Red Guard leader, Tan Lifu, its most articulate exponent, as 'poisonous weeds'. In this way they directly attacked the assumptions about the class identities of revolutionary and reactionary forces which had guided the red-class students' misinterpretation of the 'Sixteen Points' (Lee 1978, 110-16).

Faced with this attack on their position, the pro-Party Red Guards were bewildered. When *Red Flag* announced the 'new' line, they could not believe it, but when they asked for clarification they were informed by Lin Qie of the Central Cultural Revolution Group that 'The editorial of this issue is written in accordance with the instructions of Chairman Mao and his close comrade-in-arms, Comrade Lin Piao.' (Lee 1978, 114). When they complained to Premier Zhou Enlai, he told them bluntly:

> You are hoodwinked and influenced by them [the Party committees]. Get rid of their influence and rectify yourselves. Those who are influenced most deeply are you, the so-called majority faction, who supported the work teams ... (Lee 1978, 116).

The red-class Red Guards' misinterpretation of Mao's message had been corrected, leaving them thoroughly bewildered. 'Why,' they asked, are the Party and the CYL [Communist Youth League] members in our colleges mostly on the conservative side?' 'How can it be possible that the sons of cadres, who constituted the creative and vital forces of the revolutionary organizations in the middle schools, are conservative?' (Lee 1978, 92). Some of them, forced to choose between the Maoist line and the Party, chose the latter. The Xicheng Inspection Team, for example, the élite Red Guard unit which had policed the activities of other Red Guards, formed itself into a paramilitary organization defending the government ministries from attack. This was not the sort of 'free mobilization of the masses' which the Maoists had wanted, so the public security forces were used to suppress the 'conservative' Red Guards, as they were now called. Those arrested included Song Binbin, the Red Guard who had pinned the red arm band to Mao's sleeve at the rally of 18 August.

Most of the conservative Red Guards did not defy the Maoist leadership openly. Indeed, they remained eager to do Mao's will. They were therefore able to re-emerge under new labels to participate in the Cultural Revolution. It is clear, though, that their class-based assumptions continued to influence their interpretation of instructions from the Maoist leaders. They did attack the Party, but tried to limit their attacks to particular individuals. Those whom they singled out fell largely into two categories:

1. Senior Party leaders who had been identified by the Maoist-controlled newspapers as appropriate targets and whose downfall was inevitable.

2. Cadres in technical positions, rather than political ones, who were often of middle class or bad class backgrounds.

Red-class cadres in leading positions were ignored, where possible, and attempts were made to preserved the Party's organizational integrity (Lee 1978, 312-22). This restraint reflected the class-based background

assumptions with which the conservative Red Guards complemented the interpretive assumptions given to them by Yao Wenyuan and the 'Sixteen Points': the latter assumptions, which could be used to 'prove' that almost anyone was a capitalist-roader, were to be applied selectively, directed mainly at non-red targets.

By late 1966, however, the conservatives were not the only Red Guards. They were not even in the forefront of the Cultural Revolution. New 'Rebel' Red Guards had emerged, largely from non-red class backgrounds and with very different background assumptions. They had no inhibitions about using Yao's interpretive principles and the 'Sixteen Points' against the Party, and within a few months, backed by the Central Cultural Revolution Group and by Mao himself, they had swept the Party almost entirely away.

3.9 Mao Finds an Audience with the 'Correct' Context of Interpretation: Rise of the 'Rebel' Red Guards

Some red-class students had fallen foul of the work teams, but they were a small minority. In general, students from good class backgrounds had been eager to co-operate with the work teams. And they had been flattered when the work teams, in accordance with traditional Maoist assumptions, sought them out and placed them at the forefront of the Cultural Revolution. When the work teams 'pointed the arrow downwards', again in accordance with traditional Maoist assumptions, most red-class students saw this as the correct revolutionary strategy. They relished the chance to show their revolutionary fervour at the expense of the bad classes.

Middle class students were mostly 'followers' in political matters, fearful of challenging the 'red' students' ascendancy and anxious to adopt the revolutionary orthodoxy of the moment. Most admitted that there was some truth in the doctrine of 'natural redness' and accepted the standard Maoist assumption that anti-revolutionary elements were to be found principally in the bad classes (Chan 1985, 120, 139). So only a minority had 'pointed the arrow' at the Party and been suppressed by the work teams. What rankled with many middle class students, alienating them from the work teams, was the way in which the teams endorsed the class prejudices of the 'red' students and excluded nearly all other students from revolutionary committees and other leading positions. In other words, the

work teams robbed the middle class students of the chance to show exceptional revolutionary fervour, relegating them to the role of 'hangers on' - assistant persecutors of the bad classes (Chan 1985, esp. 128-9, 132-3).

Students with bad class backgrounds 'complained among themselves privately' at their outcast status, and few were able to bring themselves to denounce and renounce their families - the only way in which they could achieve even partial redemption. During the work teams' rule, they had suffered under the 'Red Terror' imposed by the 'red' students and their middle class adjutants. Far more than the middle class students, they resented the 'class line' which Mao and the Party imposed, and their agony was intense when the struggle intensified during the early phases of the Revolution. Although most were too fearful to become politically active, once the work teams were withdrawn a small minority joined the student revolt, revealing interpretive assumptions which differed radically from those of red-class students. (Chan 1985, 119, 129, 139; Raddock 1977).

When the work teams were withdrawn, students who had been suppressed for criticizing their activities or challenging the Party committees felt vindicated. They had frequently been condemned by the work teams and most red-class students as 'anti-Party Rightists', but they had never accepted that label. So, no matter what their class background, they could instantly retrieve all the assumptions required for the following self-justifying explicature of the 'Sixteen Points'' condemnation of certain work teams:

(a) 'In certain schools, units and work teams of the cultural revolution, some of the persons in charge have organized counter-attacks against the masses who put up big-character posters against them ... In this way it is inevitable that their blows will fall on some really revolutionary activists.' ('Sixteen Points', *CCP Documents*, 48, emphasis added).

(b) We are members of the 'masses' and 'really revolutionary activists'.

(c) The 'persons in charge' in our school (or unit or work team) organized counter-attacks against us for putting up big-character posters against them.

(d) Therefore the 'Sixteen Points' condemn the 'persons in charge' of our school (or unit or work team) and vindicate us.

So they now had more reason than ever to attack the school authorities or work teams which had persecuted them. When they did so, they were generally opposed by a majority of red-class students, particularly the children of cadres, whose class-based interpretive assumptions had led them to a different explicature. However, middle class students, who resented the way in which the 'red' students and the work teams had marginalized them, overwhelmingly supported the rebels' explicature and began to rally to their support (Chan, Rosen & Unger 1980; Lee 1978).

Emboldened by the vindication of the rebels and by the declaration in the 'Sixteen Points' that capitalist roaders within the Party were the main target, a handful of middle class students sensed that the school Party committees were about to become as vulnerable as the teachers had been. Often, says Jonathon Unger, they 'had no special grievances against their school Party committee, just as their earlier attacks on teachers had not normally been fuelled by concrete grievances.' (1982, 116-17). An interview by Anita Chan with the normally articulate former deputy-commander of Canton's high school Rebel Red Guards bears this out. Asked why he had opposed the school committee, he was lost for words:

> Actually ... hm ... the basic problems with the Party committee weren't big. I thought it done some wrong things ... (pause) ... such as something bureaucratic ... (pause) The school principal was lazy, I thought ... (pause) ... Actually, when talking about him or the Party committee, there weren't many concrete problems ... (pause) ... but how could we know that inside the committee there were no problems? Especially after reading the 16 Points I was convinced ... At the time the spearhead was pointed against the teachers instead. I thought that was wrong, that it should be against the Party branch. So I criticized the workteam [and implicitly the good-background youths and League] for making a mistake in direction. [Quoted in Unger 1982, 117].

So he was able to attack the school committee and the work team using the sudden switch in interpretive assumptions with which Mao had trapped the Party in late July and August. Those who wanted to prove their revolutionary credentials by attacking the Party in the schools

had been given the perfect weapon.

In some schools, resentment of the 'class line' imposed by red-class students led to a backlash against party stalwarts. When the work team left Ken Ling's school, he lost his fear and felt that the Cultural Revolution 'had now become a student affair':

> In the new circumstances, I felt that I had to name a few power holders as "reactionary academic authorities" and "cow ghosts and snake demons." ... In particular I named people with peasant or worker backgrounds who had since "changed character" - abused their new authority as members of the five red classes. I did so to avenge my family - grandfather, father and uncles - who had lost their considerable property and jobs and land because of such scoundrels. Altogether I named more than twenty people. I avoided naming teachers I respected or members of the five black classes ... I sympathized with them because we shared the same fate, although my father was considered middle class - my father had been a bank manager. I was strongly opposed to those in my class with a "5 red" background who pointed out that this was "intentional class revenge"; but these classmates were overruled, and we kicked them out of the class on the charge of betrayal ... The overwhelming majority of students in our school were of the five black classes; this was one of its exceptional characteristics. [Ling 1972, 22-3].

In the hands of someone like Ling, the switches of interpretive context engineered by Mao and Yao Wenyuan could be used to prove, to the satisfaction of anyone who wanted 'class revenge', that even the reddest of '5-red' teachers and cadres had been following the capitalist road.

When Jiang Qing, Chen Boda and the Central Cultural Revolution Group attacked the doctrine of 'natural redness' in October and declared that all students with a correct revolutionary ideology should be able to join the Red Guards, middle class students enthusiastically formed their own units. A few bad class students joined too, as did dissident '5-red' students - especially young people from working class families who resented the arrogance and condescending ways of many of the cadre's children. The new units often had a red-class leader for the sake of appearance, but the power nearly always lay with their middle class members. It was these 'Rebel' Red Guards, composed principally of non-red students, who were the principal weapon which Mao and the Central Cultural Revolution Group used to humiliate the

Party (Lee 1978; Unger 1982; Rosen 1982; Chan 1985; Chan, Rosen & Unger 1980).

The students who joined the Rebel Red Guards easily abandoned the interpretive assumptions which had blinded the red-class 'Royalist' Red Guards to Mao's message. Most of them had never liked the doctrine of 'natural redness' and they rejected extreme versions of it outright; but this was the very doctrine which underpinned the red-class students' conviction that it was the bad classes, not the Party, which was the main threat to socialism. When the 'Sixteen Points' demanded action at variance with the assumptions of the doctrine, middle class students understood the appeal far more easily than red class ones; and when the Central Cultural Revolution Group condemned all but the milder forms of the doctrine, they rejoiced that the disadvantages of non-red status had been diminished. Some even claimed that class origin should be disregarded altogether as a criterion of revolutionary virtue (White 1976; Kraus 1981).

Some went further still, developing Mao's critical comments about bureaucratic tendencies in the Party into the far more radical theory that China had developed a new class structure in which the privileged elite consisted of revolutionary cadres and their families, who were nothing but a stratum of 'red capitalists' and a 'new-born bourgeoisie' (Chan 1985, 144-5). The cadre children therefore belonged to the oppressors, and students from middle class and even black families joined the workers and peasants amongst the oppressed.

Once assumptions like these began to spread amongst the Rebels, calls for extreme action against the Party were both welcome and easily understood. The Rebels began to take seriously and literally the instruction in the 'Sixteen Points' that the 'revolutionary masses' should elect revolutionary groups, committees and congresses on a permanent basis, having the right to replace those whom they elected at any time. This instruction was based on the model of the Paris Commune, and it formed the context in which the Rebels heard and understood calls from the Central Cultural Revolution Group that they should seize power from the Party. They were joined by underprivileged workers, who answered the call to wrest control of their workplaces from the capitalist roaders who now seemed to be everywhere in the Party. Thus

occurred the 'January Power Seizure' in which, as Hong Yung Lee has put it, 'a so-called totalitarian regime governing a quarter of the world's population ordered its people to seize power from itself for the sake of revolution.' (Lee 1978, 140). It was at this point that Mao's strategy began to have consequences far beyond his original plan, or even his present desires. Mao, having manipulated the interpretive assumptions of the non-red students so that they would subject the Party to the purge and the shock which he desired, suddenly began to lose control of the context of interpretation. And once that happened, his ability to manipulate people's behaviour by controlling the meaning of what they said sharply declined. At his moment of greatest success he lost control, and the Cultural Revolution began its descent into chaos.

3.10 Mao Loses Control of the Context of Interpretation: the Descent into Chaos

The January Power Seizure severely damaged Mao's ability to communicate his message through his usual means: directives of the Central Committee, statements from the Central Cultural Revolution Group, and authoritatively worded editorials in official Party newspapers. And when he lost much of his ability to communicate his message, he lost control of the Cultural Revolution.

The Power Seizure undermined Mao's power to communicate partly because it led to a change in policy which strained the Rebels' faith in his word. He had freed them from their parents, freed them from their teachers and freed them from control by the Party. He had seemed to offer them a permanent say in the government of revolutionary China through democratically elected groups, committees and congresses based on the model of the Paris Commune. The rebels foresaw a future in which they - 'the masses' - would rule, guided by the Thought of Mao Zedong. The Rebels worshipped Mao as their liberator, and they found the sudden rush of power and freedom intoxicating. One leading Rebel told Anita Chan:

> In the period just before the call of January 1967 to 'seize power', the weather was quite cold. But when I walked in the streets the wind seemed like a spring draught wafting toward me. I'd never felt so free. Ah, it was truly exhilarating. I felt myself so lucky to have been born at this time of history in China, born under the flag of Chairman Mao

> - on the one hand to have been liberated by Mao Zedong, and on the other to have experienced such a sublime sense of freedom. [Chan 1985, 124].

But when in the wake of the Power Seizure in Shanghai the victorious Rebel workers and students actually set up a Paris-style Commune, Mao opposed it on the grounds that 'if everything were changed into Communes, then what about the Party? ... There must be a Party somehow; there must be a nucleus.' (Chan 1985, 145). He wanted to use the Party to discipline the masses, just as he wanted the masses to punish the Party for 'betraying' his Thought. If the masses defeated the Party and became supreme, he feared that there would be chaos. So he ordered that the Commune be replaced by a Revolutionary Committee consisting of the PLA, rehabilitated cadres and representatives of the new organizations representing the revolutionary masses. The cadres would keep the country running, while the army would make sure that the masses did not get out of control. For the first time since the 'Sixteen Points' Mao had disappointed the Rebels. Before long they began to wonder if he always spoke with his own voice, or if he was sometimes misrepresented or subjected to pressure. They were losing faith in the directives attributed to him which came from the Party Centre. As one former Red Guard put it:

> When our ideas were still fuzzy, the centre [Central Committee] had called on us in the Sixteen Points to 'believe in the masses, rely on the masses'. In the end when we came to realize that in a genuine socialist revolution this was the crucial point, suddenly the centre said they did not want this thing anymore! How could we then, because we had to obey the centre, give this thing up? We couldn't any more... At this point, everyone began to discover that he was a bit of a reactionary, reactionary by not listening to the centre. On the contrary, we expected the centre to direct us as it had earlier, in accordance with our aspirations, our hopes, our demands. [Chan 1985, 147-8].

During 1967 and 1968, apathy and cynicism became rife, while drinking, smoking, vandalism and theft became commonplace. As another former Red Guard recalled:

> Though I didn't, many others stole and broke things. Some would see a glass window, fling a stone at it and run. They just didn't know how to express their anger and disappointment ... We were just crazy. We felt changed ... We just felt we had nothing any more, those ideals we had, those expectations and enthusiasm to serve mankind. These seemed so unreal ... There was no more meaning. [Chan 1985, 148-9].

As these attitudes spread, directives from the Centre lost their power to persuade, or even to capture their previous audience. Mao himself was still not usually blamed for what had gone wrong, but his ability to control interpretation sharply diminished. People chose whatever interpretive assumptions they preferred and read Mao how they liked.

Equally important, the January Power Seizure destroyed the unity of the coalition which had nurtured the Cultural Revolution and had brought the Communist Party to the brink of destruction. The Central Cultural Revolution Group split into a moderate faction and a radical one. The former, associated with Kang Sheng and Yao Wenyuan, accepted the abolition of the Shanghai Commune and protected Zhou Enlai from attack. The latter, led by Qi Benyu, incited agitation against Zhou and sought to intensify the war against the bureaucracy. Most dangerous of all, the radical faction called for a purge of the PLA's leaders and incited the Red Guards to raid arsenals and attack regional military commanders (Lee 1978, ch. 8; Kwong 1988, 94-5).

With the Party Centre openly divided, some directives were vaguely worded compromises between different factions, and their implications were hard to discern. Other directives flatly contradicted each other. For example, in January 1967, the government called for reconciliation with the cadres, but five months later it told revolutionaries to 'hound the enemies to the end.' (Kwong 1988, 106). Even when the radicals were sacked in September 1967, it proved impossible to guarantee consistency in the signals sent from the Centre, let alone uniformity of interpretation amongst the Red Guards and the wider public. The effect of all this has been neatly summarized by Kwong:

> These conflicting messages, compounded by the breakdown of mechanisms of social control, increased confusion that further undermined the government's influence. Sometimes the Red Guards openly defied central directives; at other times they used whichever directives suited them and ignored the rest, then accused their rivals who did likewise of disobeying central government orders. [Kwong 1988, 106; also 107-27].

In this context, Mao's words, while never openly questioned, became little more than a weapon for belabouring opponents. As Ken Ling later recalled:

> During the ensuing two years [from October 1966] I was never to hear my colleagues discuss how to defend Mao Tse-tung thought or the rule of the proletariat. All I heard was how to strengthen our own organization and weaken the opposing one. Sometimes my schoolmates would appeal to me: Old Ling, hurry up and find something in the Mao quotations that we can use to bat our opponents down. We'll use it a thousand times in our propaganda today. We know you remember more of them and know how to apply them. [Ling 1972, 131].

Mao's Thought could be used to prove anything at all. It was no longer controlled by Mao, who had all but destroyed the Party which he had once used to disseminate his word and regulate its interpretation. Rather, it was controlled by the Red Guards - and it was they who selected, to suit themselves, the context of interpretation.

Repeated calls by the Party Centre for the Red Guards to stop fighting each other, to be tolerant of cadres and not to attack soldiers went unheeded in the latter part of the Cultural Revolution. Every Red Guard organization paid lip service to these appeals - summed up in the slogan 'great unity' - then selected a context of interpretation which neutralized their intended effect. The *Middle School War Gazette*, for instance, interpreted the slogan as an instruction that revolutionary organizations - centres of 'great unity' - should not be disbanded but rebuilt, strengthened and supported (Kwong 1988, 111). The paper was thus able to turn the slogan round so that it became a recommendation that revolutionary organizations would gather strength for combat with anti-revolutionary enemies.

Finally, to enforce peace, Mao mobilized the workers and the PLA against the students, sending them into the schools and universities to take charge. The 'Rebel' Red Guards resisted, suspecting that some 'black hand'

had mobilized the workers. So Mao summoned five nationally prominent student leaders - 'the five heavenly kings' - and with tears streaming down his face he told them:

> I am the 'black hand' [who has been ordering your suppression]. If you leave this meeting and try to say something different, I warn you that I am making a tape recording of the meeting and will make it public. [Lieberthal 1995, 115; cf. Goldman 1981, 155].

This personal appeal, with its explicit threat, was backed by the force of the PLA and by Workers' Mao Zedong Propaganda Teams which were despatched to school and university campuses. It brought the chaotic phase of the Cultural Revolution to a close. In a face to face encounter, at least, Mao was still able to get his message across, to correct any interpretive assumptions which led, or enabled, his audience to miss or evade his intended meaning. And with the establishment of a new hierarchy of coercion, his word was once again law.

In 1982, a former Red Guard leader described what had happened during the Cultural Revolution: 'First the government [Mao] turned against the intellectuals, then the party members, then the students. We were all being used.' (Kwong 1988, 131-2). Phrases like 'we were used', 'manipulated', 'betrayed', 'naïve' recur time and time again in the recollections of former Red Guards (Chan 1985, 184; and personal conversations). Mao had used the campaign against Wu Han in order to trap Peng Zhen, the Beijing Party Committee, the Propaganda Department and the Ministry of Culture; he had used the Party to spread Yao Wenyuan's interpretive assumptions and to mobilize the students; he had used the red-class Red Guards to attack the intellectuals, brutalize the 'bad' classes and destroy the 'old' culture; he had used the 'rebel' students and workers to destroy the Party's power; and in the end he used 'non-aligned' workers and the PLA to bring Red Guards of all factions to heel, describing their mentality as 'basically bourgeois' (quoted in Liu 1986, 49). Those whom he had used, he condemned and cast off. Most former Red Guards, including virtually all the 'Rebels', were exiled to the countryside to be 're-educated' by the peasants and live out their days as agricultural labourers.

The most striking feature of Mao's strategy is that, from the beginning of the Cultural Revolution down to the Power Seizure of January 1967, his most effective weapon was a sudden change in interpretive assumptions

which transformed people who had hitherto been 'revolutionaries' and 'socialists' into 'capitalist roaders', 'bourgeois intellectuals' or 'revisionists'. At first, this weapon was deadly, and Mao manipulated it with great skill to destroy the Party. However, when Mao continued to change the context of interpretation after January 1967, so that even the 'Rebels' became 'bourgeois', the tactic lost its credibility. Mao had made too many people the victims of his carefully calculated changes in the 'correct' line, and ended up causing only suffering, confusion, disillusionment and cynicism. The outcome was the emergence of a 'faction of wanderers' (*xiao yao pai*) who opted out of politics and gave themselves up to dissipation, and the creation of a 'lost' and cynical generation of former 'Rebel' Red Guards (cf. Lee 1978, 287). So Mao's repeated manipulation of interpretive assumptions eventually undermined his goal of fashioning a society of true believers. As a savage lesson to the Party, the Cultural Revolution's chaotic phase had worked brilliantly. As an agency of revolutionary ideological transformation it was, after the initial stages, an utter failure.

CHAPTER 4

REVOLUTIONARY CONFORMITY, PUBLIC CRITICISM AND FORMULAE

4.1 'A Language after Mao': the Cult of the Word

'Ever since the Communists came to power nineteen years ago,' wrote H.C. Chuang in 1968, 'every political campaign in China has been simultaneously a semantic campaign as well, introducing or reviving a plethora of shibboleths and slogans with such determination and concentration that it sometimes borders on verbomania or graphomania. Mao strikes one as a true believer of word magic, like the earlier Greek philosophers who held that "nothing, whether human or superhuman, is beyond the power of words."' (Chuang 1968, 47). At no time was this more true than during the Cultural Revolution. Mao never made the mistake of thinking that control of language was the only thing required to control thought, but he knew that it was vital. And even when, as we saw in the last chapter, he lost control of the context of interpretation, he retained control of the word. People wrote and spoke the language of Mao worship and revolution as never before, even as their interpretations of what that language meant diverged.

Since Mao launched the Cultural Revolution partly to destroy those whom he suspected of deviating from his Thought, it is not surprising that the central text of the Cultural Revolution was a pocket compendium of ideological essentials, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong*. It became the international symbol of the Cultural Revolution, known to the world as the 'Little Red Book'. It originated in the General Political Department of the People's Liberation Army and consisted of quotations from Mao's speeches, writings and directives which had previously appeared in the *Liberation Army Daily*. It first appeared in August 1964 and a slightly revised version was published in August 1965, its preface stating that Party Vice-Chairman Lin Biao had directed that copies be distributed 'like weapons ... to each and every person in our army.' (Chuang 1968, 2-3; Yan & Gao 1986, 191).

Then in late 1966, with a preface written by Lin Biao, the book became available to the 'broad masses' of the Chinese people. It was an instant sensation, with a second edition published before the end of the year and a further 350 million copies being printed in 1967. By the middle of that year the book had been translated into no fewer than 22 foreign languages as the 'magic weapon' of Mao Zedong's Thought spread throughout the world (Chuang 1968, 1-2). Ultimately, about 2 billion copies were printed (Dittmer 1987, 38). In China itself, the book became indispensable, being quoted to support every point of view and every course of action, being waved to demonstrate revolutionary enthusiasm at mass rallies, and being clasped in the hand - often held across the breast - in a display of Mao worship and ideological rectitude.

Mastery of the Little Red Book brought prestige. Students with exceptional memories and extraordinary determination were able to learn all 270 pages of the book by heart and recite any passage, word perfect, on demand. One star performer visited my school and gave a stunning recitation. We were sure that she must be a dedicated revolutionary. Conversely, inability to quote the book could be taken as proof of reactionary politics. Red Guards sometimes tried to catch their opponents out, demanding that they quote particular passages. When Gao Yuan was interrogated by an opposing faction of Red Guards, they told him to 'Recite the quotation on page ten, paragraph two.' When at first he failed, his opponents gloated, 'No wonder you're such a reactionary; you don't even know Chairman Mao's works ... We're not going to let you stand up until you recite the quotation.' (Gao 1987, 332-3). With a little prompting from a former friend, Gao eventually passed the test, but not all were so lucky. Red Guards interrogating Liu Shaoqi demanded that he recite the first paragraph of the Little Red Book. His wife, Wang Guangmei, was sure that he could do it but Liu, 'stammering and hesitating, could not get any farther than "the force at the core leading our cause is," and, while saying that, he still forgot the words, "at the core."' (*Mainichi*, 11 Jan. 1967, quoted Dittmer 1974, 102). Wang Guangmei herself suffered a similar 'trial by quotation'.

The Little Red Book and Mao's other works were also used to re-educate and intimidate students from the five black categories. Zhai Zhenhua recalls that she and other Red Guards forced such students to sit at their desks using 'Mao Zedong thought to reform their own'. Then, 'When off duty, we Red Guards would monitor how they were doing. We would walk cockily in front of them and at times stop before a student. She would be directed to recite a quotation from Chairman Mao's books or to report her progress in her own personal reform.' (Zhai 1992, 105).

The Party newspapers and journals led the way in worshipping Mao's word. From about October 1965, as the Mao-cult intensified during the prelude to the Cultural Revolution, the *People's Daily* began to print quotations from Mao's works at the head of each issue. Other Party journals soon adopted the practice. During the Cultural Revolution proper, almost every article was packed with Mao's aphorisms, and for a time in late 1966 the quotations were printed in big, red characters (Chuang 1968, 10). Incessant exposure to Mao's word became an inescapable part of Chinese reality. People with a literary bent sometimes learned by heart all 37 of Mao's poems, gaining prestige by reciting them on appropriate occasions. Quotation boards began to appear at intersections, street crossings and other places where people congregated, and walls, fences and the sides of buildings were festooned with Mao quotes. The 'Sixteen Points' officially declared the whole country a 'great school' of Mao Zedong's Thought, and from early 1967 'study classes of Mao Zedong's Thought' proliferated in which Mao's writings were discussed as sacred texts (Chuang 1968, 44). Even the illiterate had no escape. They had the texts read to them at the study classes, they heard Mao's message constantly from radios and the ever-present loudspeakers, and they were taught quotation songs which made it easy for them to memorize his words.

Mao's Thought was not confined to the official media and the classroom. People were required constantly to relate it to the details of everyday life. This could be taken to comical extremes. Gao Yuan recalls how one day he heard a housewife and a vegetable seller conduct an argument in quotations:

> The housewife was choosing tomatoes with great care, examining each one, since they were expensive in the winter. The displeased sales clerk said, 'Fight selfishness and repudiate revisionism.' The housewife replied, 'We Communists pay great attention to conscientiousness.' They quoted back and forth until they were ready for a fight. Onlookers used quotations to stop them. (Gao 1987, 319).

The banality of the subject over which the two women were fighting was unusual, but the practice of using quotations to win an argument was not. Indeed the phrase 'fight a quotation war' (*da yulu zhang*) became part of the Chinese language. Nor was the self-interested use of quotations unusual. Mao's language permeated daily life, even when those who used it were not motivated by revolutionary piety.

A 'revolution to touch people's souls' required revolutionary nomenclature. It started in Beijing, where Red Guards 'launched a massive attack on those shop and place names which give off a foul smell of decadent feudal and bourgeoisie ideology'; the aim was to 'turn our capital into a extremely proletarian and revolutionized new city', to 'turn every industry, every shop and every unit into a school of Mao Zedong Thought and into a battle field for propagating and carrying out Mao Zedong Thought.' (*Shoudu gongren xingdong qilai, jianjue zhichi geming xuesheng,* 23 August, 1966. *RGP*, vol. 19, p. 6110). Shops and theatres with unsatisfactory names had their signs pulled down and replaced with titles like 'Worker-Peasant-Soldier Wineshop', 'Red Guard Department Store' or 'Sun-facing Restaurant' - in which the 'Sun', of course, stood for Chairman Mao. Streets were re-named. A street with many western embassies became Anti-imperialism Road, the street in which the Soviet embassy stood became Anti-revisionism Road, and hundreds of lesser thoroughfares sported new, revolutionary titles. The fashion spread to other cities. In my own city of Tianjin, many establishments piously adopted the title '813' - as in '813 Restaurant' - to commemorate Mao's visit to the city on August 13, 1958. In Chengdu, recalls Jung Chang (1992, 382),

> streets were shedding old names like 'Five Generations under One Roof' (a Confucian virtue), 'The Poplar and Willow Are Green' (green was not a revolutionary color), and 'Jade Dragon' (a symbol of feudal power). They became 'Destroy the Old,' 'The East is Red,' and 'Revolution' streets. A famous restaurant called

'The Fragrance of Sweet Wind' had its plaque broken to bits. It was renamed 'The Whiff of Gunpowder.'

People, too, sometimes took new names. Gao Yuan re-named himself Shijie Shu ('Changes in the World' - a phrase from Mao's poems). His less literary classmates took names like Bao Dongbiao ('Safeguard Mao Zedong and Lin Biao'), Chongmao ('Revere Mao'), Xiangdong ('Towards the East'), Jihong ('Inherit Red'), Yongge ('Forever Revolutionary'), Fanxiu ('Anti-revisionism') and Miezi ('Liquidate the Bourgeoisie') (Gao 1987, 96). Some people whom I knew adopted names like Chang Fanxiu ('Fight Revisionism'), Xuegong ('Learn from the Workers'), Xuejun ('Learn from the PLA'), Naxin ('Take in the Fresh' - words from one of Mao's latest directives). This wholesale re-naming caused great confusion, however, and as a result many of the new names were soon dropped. Less ephemeral were the names given to children born during the Cultural Revolution. Names given to people whom I knew included Weidong ('Defend Mao Zedong'), Wenge ('Cultural Revolution'), Dongfang ('East'), Sixin ('Four News'), Yingzi ('Heroic bearing' - quoted from Mao's poem describing his wife Jiang Qing) and Yan'an (location of the Communist Party's revolutionary base in the 1940s).

Because language was taken as a guide to thought, the consequences of linguistic error could be horrendous. People began to fear what was known as 'one character mistake' (*yi zi zhi cha*). One teacher wrote a poster criticizing Liu Shaoqi, putting three red X's over the name of the name of the 'Number One Capitalist Roader'. Unfortunately, in one line he accidentally put red X's over Chairman Mao's name instead and was branded a counterrevolutionary (Gao 1987, 189). A female 'Rebel' Red Guard, while being questioned by 'Loyalist' opponents, was so nervous that she accidentally said that she was trying to start a revolution against 'the proletariat' instead of 'the capitalists'. More than ten male 'Loyalists' ripped her clothes, sexually assaulted her and beat her so savagely that she had to be taken to hospital in an ambulance (Ling 1972, 80-81). People had to be very careful what they said to members of their own families, especially children, for unthinking words by a child could bring disaster to everyone (Chen 1978). My own family was lucky that no one discovered that I was the author of an anti-Lin Biao slogan which

appeared on a wall while Lin was still officially Mao's 'closest comrade in arms'. Others were less fortunate. At Nankai University, where I grew up, the four year old daughter of the Registrar unwittingly betrayed her own grandmother by repeating an unguarded comment. The old woman was savagely persecuted and one day I discovered her lifeless body dangling from a noose. She had hanged herself. The girl's father, already under pressure, killed himself soon after. Searching for meaning in the devastation, the little girl became a compulsive collector of Chairman Mao badges and slowly went mad.

Under these circumstances, the safest course, and the most revolutionary one, was to speak and write in Chairman Mao's own words. Editors of newspapers and journals, fearing that the slightest deviation from Chairman Mao's revolutionary line would result in their dismissal, filled their columns with extracts from Mao's works, with articles stitched together around Mao-quotes, and with Party documents filled with phrases borrowed from Mao. This was the language of public life, and it infiltrated the language of personal communication as people resorted to safe formulae because they were uncertain about whom they could trust.

The Cultural Revolution had an immense impact on the Chinese language. It was not that people learned a new Maoist-Marxist vocabulary which categorized reality in novel ways. It was not even that the language began to incorporate Mao's more distinctive personal expressions and usages. These processes were far advanced before the Cultural Revolution. What happened during the Cultural Revolution was that people began to write and speak in Mao's actual words on a grand scale. The result was a profound, if temporary, impoverishment of the Chinese language, which became repetitive, narrowly political and cliché ridden. Newspapers and journals which had once catered for intellectuals were now written in the language of political talks which Mao had given with the needs of illiterate soldiers and peasants in mind. Moreover, while Mao's original talks were often fresh and forceful, constant reiteration made even his most striking phrases sound hackneyed. And when his words were wrenched from their original context and applied to every situation they began to sound phoney and, to non-believers, grotesque. Overseas Chinese were often

appalled. As Chen Ruoxi, Taiwan-born but a resident in China from 1966 to 1973, lamented: 'It was not Chinese as it used to be; it was not even Mao's language, but a language of his quotations, a language after him.' (Dittmer & Chen 1981, 29).

This new 'language after Mao' was reinforced by changes in material culture as Red Guards went on the rampage during the campaign to 'Destroy the Four Olds'. Pagodas, churches, monuments, cemeteries, ornamental archways and almost all architectural remnants of the feudal era were defaced or destroyed. Raids on homes of the black categories and others suspected of hankering after the old order resulted in the destruction of countless pianos and violins (symbols of the bourgeoisie), playing cards and mah-jong tiles (associated with gambling), traditional musical instruments, calligraphic scrolls, antiques, paintings, lanterns, incense sticks, incense burners, idols, altar tables, charms and piles of paper money for the dead. Libraries and bookshops were sacked and many of their non-revolutionary holdings were burned. The damage to China's cultural heritage - the 'old' - was irreparable (Leys 1977).

The attack on the 'Four Olds' was complemented by a campaign to foster the 'Four News': new ideas, new culture, new customs and new habits. This led to radical changes in social organization, fashion and conventions. In accordance with the doctrine of 'natural redness', red-class Red Guards drove people from the black categories out of Beijing into the countryside. They were attempting, they said, to 'make our capital purer and redder' (*Tongling: Guanyu quchu sileifenzi de wuxiang mingling,* 24 August 1966. *RGP* vol. 19, p. 6069). Card games and mahjong were suppressed, as were the tea houses in which people played these games and wasted time chatting and reading. This was all 'bourgeois decadence' (the 'old') and people would now have more time to spend on revolutionary activity and the study of Mao's Thought (the 'new'). Those who wore narrow pants, skirts, high heels, pointed shoes, makeup, bracelets, or who had fashionable hairdos or even just long hair (the 'old') were stopped in the street and criticized. Sometimes their hair was cropped, their clothes were torn and their high heels were cut off on the spot. Everyone now had to adopt the 'new' proletarian appearance except for those who, like the Red Guards,

wore uniforms. In the army, all insignia of rank were abolished in an expression of revolutionary egalitarianism, and the Red Guards even made an attempt to purge military drill of non-revolutionary content. 'When we line up or when we do the militia exercises,' said one revolutionary publication, 'we must dress left. We also suggest that the PLA should dress left, because we are the army of the revolutionary left.' (*Shi zuo 'hongweibing' de jiangqiang houdun. RGP*,vol. 19, p. 6111). Traffic rules, too, were in need of reform, for since red was the colour of revolution and progress it was anti-revolutionary that red lights should tell people to 'stop'. Red Guards stood at intersections telling cyclists and drivers to 'go' on the red lights. And since the left-hand side of the road was clearly the revolutionary side, people were told that they should no longer travel on the right but keep to the left. The result was several days of utter confusion until Zhou Enlai convinced the Red Guard leaders in Beijing to desist (Chang 1992, 382).

Mao, Lin Biao and the Maoist press had not instructed the Red Guards to reform the traffic laws. Nor had they said that the destruction of 'old culture' extended to material culture - that it required them to sweep away the art, architecture and ornaments of China's cultural heritage. These were interpretations of what Mao wanted which they arrived at themselves, and they were not undisputed. In Amoy, when Red Guards tried to destroy the beautiful Temple of the Goddess of Mercy of the Southern Seas, they were driven off by the monks, then attacked by club-wielding workers who threatened to kill them; and when the looted contents of people's homes were burned in the city square, some older people tried to save idols while most others stared into the fire grieving at 'the waste of it all.' (Ling 1972, 56-7). Such conflicts were not usually between people who supported and people who opposed Mao's Thought, but between people who accepted different versions of his Thought because they understood his word with the aid of different contexts of interpretation. To a large extent, these contexts of interpretation were linked to age. Consider Liang Heng's account of a conversation between his father, an ardent revolutionary who had divorced his wife when she was labelled a Rightist, and his older sister Liang Fang, a Red Guard who had just boasted about destroying temples, pavilions, monuments and inscriptions - 'Stinking poetry of the Feudal Society':

'How could you destroy the old poetry carved in the temples and pavilions? What kind of behaviour is that?'

'What kind of behaviour? Revolutionary action, that's what.' ...

'Who asked you to do these things?' Father demanded.

'Father,' she answered with exaggerated patience. 'You really don't understand the Cultural Revolution at all, do you? We have to get rid of the Four Olds. That includes *everything* old. Don't you even read your own newspaper? You'd better keep up with things or you'll be in trouble.'

Father protested, 'It's one thing to get rid of old customs and ideas, and another to go around smashing ancient temples.'

'What good are they? They just trick people, make them superstitious. They're a bad influence on the young people.'

'Whoever influenced you?' Father demanded. 'No one in your whole life ever asked you to believe in any Buddhas.'

Liang Fang didn't have an answer, which irritated her. 'Well, anyway, they're all old things. Why aren't there Revolutionary poems, Chairman Mao's poems, statues of people's heroes, workers, peasants, and soldiers?'

Father despaired. 'It's all over! China's old culture is being destroyed.' He hit the table with his finger for emphasis. 'Such precious historical treasures. All those symbols of China's ancient culture gone in only a few days . You've wronged your ancestors.' (Liang & Shapiro 1983, 70-71).

The argument betrayed the contrasting interpretive assumptions of different generations. Liang Heng's father, a journalist, had been educated to value what was good in the Chinese past and he could not believe that Chairman Mao, whose writings had many classical allusions, wanted the destruction of *everything* old. And indeed, semantically, 'old ideas, old culture, old customs, old habits' made no clear reference to temples, pavilions, pictures and inscriptions. Liang Fang, however, was a true child of Mao. Her education had said nothing positive about China's old order, it had subordinated every value to correct politics, and it had taught her that all human activity was political. She could not draw a line between politics on the one hand and material culture on the other. So like many other Red Guards, she interpreted the phrase 'the Four Olds' to refer broadly to everything which conceivably *reflected* the ideology of feudal or bourgeois society.

Interpretation was also guided by assumptions related to social background. The Red Guard leaders during the 'Four Olds' campaign were nearly all the children of cadres, the most privileged stratum in Chinese society. They simply had no idea of the implications of their actions for many poor people. When Jung Chang, the daughter of high cadres, went with other Red Guards to close down a teahouse, an old working class man refused to leave:

> I summoned up my courage and pleaded in a low voice, 'Please, could you leave?' Without looking at me, he said, 'Where to?' 'Home, of course,' I replied. He turned to face me. There was emotion in his voice, though he spoke quietly. 'Home? What home? I share a tiny room with my two grandsons. I have a corner surrounded by a bamboo curtain. Just for the bed. That's all. When the kids are home I come here for some peace and quiet. Why do you have to take this away from me?' His words filled me with shock and shame. This was the first time I had heard a firsthand account of such miserable living conditions. I turned and walked away. (Chang 1992, 386).

Most red-class Red Guards shared her ignorance, but few were as polite or as lacking in determination. When Ken Ling tried to close down a factory making paper money for the dead, he told the staff that they should 'no longer pay the piper for feudal superstition', but before he could finish, a young woman interrupted him in a shrill voice:

> 'If we stop working, what do we eight hundred workers in this factory eat? And what of the thousands of others who depend on us to live? Do you want us to eat the northwest wind? All you people know is how to make rebellion against the dead. You don't do a thing for the living!' (Ling 1972, 54-5).

Ling was shaken. 'Was this true? All my life I had known only my family and school. How could I possibly understand society?' But he persisted in his attempts to close the factory. He had a middle class background and, like the cadres' children, he could afford to believe that the workers would somehow cope. The workers, by contrast, could not imagine that Chairman Mao wanted them to starve, so they did not believe that the campaign against the 'Four Olds' was directed at their factory.

The phrase 'Four Olds' was semantically open, having different referents for people with different interpretive assumptions, but

because Mao had supported the Red Guards just before their rampage of destruction it was difficult to oppose them. He probably did not expect that they would go as far as they did, but he said not a word to stop them. A man who cared little for loss of human life, who contemplated with equanimity the prospect of atomic war, he did not weep over the destruction of China's cultural heritage. What mattered was his vision of China's revolutionary future - a future of his own creation. And in this respect the actions of the Red Guards served him very well, for they provided a context of interpretation which made it clear that his call for a 'Cultural Revolution' was a call for a profound transformation. Even when they overstepped the mark, as in their attempts to revolutionize the traffic rules or wreck the Forbidden City, they were moving in the direction which Mao desired. And when, after their rampage, he described their actions as 'Very good indeed!' (Chang 1992, 377) everyone understood that what he wanted was not just another rectification campaign but a fundamental revolution in ideology, customs, social organization and culture. The legacy of China's past was to be destroyed, for it embodied values which stood in the way of complete revolutionary transformation. The varied manifestations of traditional and foreign culture which had survived the Communist takeover were to be replaced by the uniformity of the new revolutionary culture. So the old idols were replaced by plaster busts of Mao; traditional paintings and wall hangings were replaced by portraits of Mao; people had to seek guidance, not from the varied maxims of traditional wisdom or the teachings of the world's religions, but from Mao's Thought; no one was to be allowed access to anything inconsistent with Mao's Thought; and the houses in which people lived, the places where they worked, the things which they owned were in no way to express the values of the pre-Mao era. Chinese customs and material culture were purged and impoverished, bringing them into line with the new, impoverished 'language after Mao' which was the official language of revolutionary China. From now on, there were to be just one culture and one language, both revolutionary. And there was to be just one god - Mao Zedong.

4.2 The Public Criticism Meeting: Discourse, Ritual and Formulae

The language of the Cultural Revolution was highly ritualistic, with stock phrases and linguistic formulae prescribed for use on particular occasions, as well as more elaborate forms of linguistic ceremonial. Participation in linguistic ritual was essential to survival, and the nature of that ritual reflected the political and social character of the Cultural Revolution.

A crucial institution in the attack on the old order was the 'Criticism and Struggle Meeting' (*pi pan hui*), generally called in English the 'Public Criticism Meeting'. One of the central rituals of the Cultural Revolution, it was rich in oral formulae, and its words and actions were structured in a ritualistic discourse which epitomised the official ideology of the Cultural Revolution. In Ji, Kuiper & Shu (1990), I contributed to a first attempt to analyse the formulaic character of its language. The overall thrust of that analysis still seems to me to be sound. In what follows, I build on the argument of this earlier study, extending it to new material and modifying it in detail.

We can trace origins of the Public Criticism Meeting to three principal influences. The first is the 'struggle' meetings which were widely used in the early years of communist rule in order to try, convict and pass sentence on 'class enemies' such as landlords, Guomindang agents and people who had tried to organize resistance to the Party (counter-revolutionaries in the narrow sense of the word). At these meetings, the accused had their hands tied behind their backs, they were subjected to verbal and physical abuse, they were formally denounced, and they were abused verbally and often physically by the audience. Except for the tied hands, this was very like the Public Criticism Meetings. There was, however, one major difference: struggle meetings were aimed not only at educating the audience but at eliminating class enemies. The accused were always found guilty, and at the end of the meeting they were sentenced - often to death. If condemned to die, they were then shot (Mu 1963, 160). By contrast, Public Criticism Meetings, for all the brutality which they sometimes

displayed, did not impose sentences. Their function was to educate the audience through criticism and class struggle.

The second influence on the Public Criticism Meeting was the Chinese Communist Party's tradition of internal criticism and self-criticism, in which comrades who had committed 'errors of thought' were verbally attacked, threatened with exclusion from the group, then welcomed back into the fold once they had made sincere self-criticisms. This tradition was based on the assumption of Party unity in pursuit of the socialist ideal; the criticism was aimed at the removal of personal faults and incorrect thoughts which threatened that ideal; and the end result was supposed to be the restoration of unity on a higher level. The whole process was summed up by the formula 'unity-criticism-unity' (Dittmer 1974, 336-7). It influenced the Public Criticism Meetings to the extent that no death penalties were imposed and some of those accused were not regarded as class enemies. However, confession and repentance at a Public Criticism Meeting did not secure acceptance back into the fold. Instead, the accused were usually interrogated again, perhaps tortured, then dragged before still further meetings for criticism. The objective was to educate the masses politically through class struggle, not to reform the accused. Indeed, the Public Criticism Meetings played a crucial role in what Lowell Dittmer (1974, 351) has called the 'non-redemptive purges' of the Cultural Revolution.

The third influence on the Public Criticism meetings was the growth of the Mao-cult during the prelude to the Cultural Revolution. In this period, the rites of Mao-worship became part of public life, and it was inevitable that they should be grafted onto the skeletal structure of the earlier struggle meetings. The result was a ritual whose individual parts and discursive structure had the dual function of unifying the revolutionary masses in worship of Mao and symbolically crushing those who ignored or defied his Thought. This dual function can be seen from even a brief outline of the Public Criticism Meeting's sequence. It commenced when the audience stood up, faced Chairman Mao's portrait and performed an act of collective Mao-worship. Nearly always it centred on China's favourite hymn, 'The East is Red':

The East is Red.
The Sun is rising.
China has brought forth a Mao Zedong.
He works for the well-being of the people.
The great emancipator is Mao Zedong.

It sometimes also included celebratory chants. In Chengdu, for example,

> A standard opening was to chant 'Ten thousand years, another ten thousand years, and yet another ten thousand years to our Great Teacher, Great Leader, Great Commander and Great Helmsman Chairman Mao!' Every time the three 'ten thousand's and four 'great's were shouted out, everyone raised their Little Red Books in unison. [Chang 1992, 439].

This chant appalled some traditional communists, for it put Mao on a level with the Chinese emperors who were addressed with the wish that they live for 'ten thousand years' (Chang 1992, 439).

Once the Mao-worship was over, all present sat down. The accused were then brought onto the stage while the audience shouted slogans denouncing them and calling upon them to confess their crimes. Then the public criticism began, with speakers loudly reading indictments from texts carefully written in advance. The criticism also included interrogation of the victim aimed at obtaining a confession and self-criticism. Both the interrogation and the indictments were punctuated by more slogans from the audience, which expressed its outrage at the revelations. The whole process could take many hours. Then, as soon as the criticism was over, the accused were usually taken off the stage while the audience stood up and gave another demonstration of revolutionary enthusiasm and Mao-worship. It normally included the chanting of slogans and perhaps also the recitation of quotations from the Little Red Book as a form of 'collective study of the sayings of Chairman Mao.' (Liang & Shapiro 1987, 121). Almost invariably, there was another song of Mao-worship, 'Sailing the Seas Depends on the Helmsman':

Sailing the seas depends on the helmsman,
Plants on the sun,
Crops on rain and dew,
And revolution on Mao Zedong Thought.

The emcee then declared the meeting closed.

This discourse pattern (Mao-worship-->accused on-->shout intimidatory slogans-->criticism with slogans-->accused off-->Mao worship) admitted of minor variations, but its main elements rapidly became stabilized because they were rooted in wider conventions of the Cultural Revolution. Nearly all formal collective activity, be it the commencement of the school day or a celebratory party or even a wedding ceremony, started with an act of Mao-worship in which the singing of 'The East Is Red' was usually a highlight. To omit Mao-worship at the beginning of such an important and formal gathering as a Public Criticism Meeting was unthinkable. Similarly, slogans expressing revolutionary fervour and hatred of class enemies were such a basic feature of Chinese collective life that they were bound to feature in a ritual confrontation with people accused of anti-revolutionary crimes. Finally, the Chinese people officially attributed every success to the inspiration of Mao Zedong's Thought, so when they ritually vanquished those who had sided with class enemies they naturally gave thanks to Mao, whose Thought had inspired their victory. In this context, 'Sailing the seas Depends on the Helmsman' was particularly appropriate, for it acknowledged that all revolutionary successes depended on Mao's Thought.

Not only were the individual elements of the discourse important, but the ritual structure in which they were arranged was highly significant. For example, the people being criticised could not be on stage while the audience sang the revolutionary songs, for that would have been considered profane. However, they had to be present when the audience shouted slogans for the first time, for the purpose of those slogans was to threaten the accused. Then when, at the end of the meeting, the accused were often led away before the Mao-worship began, this was again because their presence would have been considered profane: 'According to custom, the worst counterrevolutionaries had no right to listen to the sayings of Chairman Mao.' (Liang & Shapiro 1983). Even if the accused were allowed to stay, they had to remain kneeling with their heads down while the audience stood and worshipped Mao. They were unworthy to participate in the revolutionary activities of the people.

Within this framework, small variations were possible, but the discourse structure of the Public Criticism Meeting was fairly stable over time and from place to place in China. We can clarify that structure by re-writing it as a set of context-free re-write rules:

> Public Criticism Meeting --> worship 1 (incl. song 1) + slogan shouting 1 + criticism/struggle + worship 2 (incl. slogan shouting 2 & song 2)
>
> Song 1 --> 'The East Is Red'
> Slogan shouting 1 --> hatred + threats to the accused
> Slogan shouting 2 --> homage to Mao
> Song 2 --> 'Sailing the Seas Depends on the Helmsman'

It is instructive to compare this discourse structure with that of Christian revivalist religious meetings:

> Revivalist religious meetings --> worship 1 (incl. hymn(s)1) + prayers 1 + criticism/struggle + worship 2 (incl. prayers 2 + hymn(s) 2)

The criticism/struggle is, of course, the criticism of sin and sinners in the sermon and, in some revivalist traditions, the struggle with Satan in the form of the casting out of devils. In these traditions, too, the congregation joins in the struggle with prayerful interjections whose role parallels that of the slogans which punctuate the criticising at a public criticism meeting. We can bring out the common discourse structure of the two rituals as follows:

> Maoist and Christian revivalist rituals –> group formulaic singing 1 + group formulaic speech 1+ criticism/struggle + group formulaic speech 2 + group formulaic singing 2

Both religions, the Maoist and the Christian revivalist, unite the faithful by formulaic collective activity, consolidate that unity by condemning the enemy, then consolidate it again with more formulaic collective activity. Some techniques of consciousness building and persuasion are common to even the most antagonistic religions.

Just as the discourse structure of revivalist meetings reflects worship of God and the struggle against Satan, so the discourse structure of Public Criticism Meetings reflected worship of Mao and the struggle against class enemies. Any significant departure from that discourse structure was a sign that something had gone wrong. When Nien Cheng, for example, was paraded before an audience of military men in 1969, she noticed that Lin Biao's portrait was next to Mao's on the stage. Even more surprising, the speeches criticising her were not

followed by Mao-worship but by speeches praising Lin Biao 'in the most extravagant flattery the rich Chinese language could provide.' (Cheng 1986, 248-51). The meeting was being observed by a high-ranking person, perhaps Lin or his son, and the display of Lin-worship reflected his ambition to succeed Mao. In some military circles there were now two gods in heaven (Yan & Gao 1996, 302-35), and this situation was reflected in the structure of Nien Cheng's Public Criticism Meeting. Something had indeed gone wrong. However, Lin's subsequent fall from grace and the failure of his coup attempt ensured that such changes to the formula of Public Criticism Meetings never became common. Mao remained China's One True God.

It was not just the discourse structure of the Public Criticism Meeting as a whole which was formulaic. Each of the parts was richly formulaic too, and their character rewards closer scrutiny. Let us start with the slogans used to intimidate the victims before the criticisms began. They were always carefully orchestrated, usually by the emcee, who would shout them first then be followed by the audience. They always came from the standard repertoire of Cultural Revolution slogans and many had the slogan-form *Dadao NP* ('Down with NP'), where 'NP' stands for a noun-phrase inserted in the appropriate slot. Consider some of the variations on this formula:

(1) *Dadao Liu Shaoqi*
'Down with Liu Shaoqi!'

(2) *Dadao diguozhuyi de zougou Liu Shaoqi*
'Down with the running dog of the imperialists, Liu Shaoqi!

(3) *Dadao diguozhuyi*
'Down with the imperialists!'

(4) *Dadao pantu neijian gongzei Liu Shaoqi*
'Down with the traitor, renegade, and scab, Liu Shaoqi!'

The purpose of these slogans, of course, was to threaten the victims and to express hatred of the class enemies associated with them.

While most of the slogans which greeted the arrival of the victims were explicitly intimidatory, some meetings included at this point a few celebratory or pious slogans like 'Long live our Great Leader Chairman

Mao!' or 'Long live the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution!' (Cheng 1986, 15). Semantically, such slogans seem inconsistent with the formula for this section of the meeting, which requires the expression of 'hatred + threats to the accused'. However, semantics were misleading, for the pragmatic function of these slogans was again intimidatory: they were shouted to show the imposing unity of the revolutionary people in the face of the 'capitalist roaders', 'revisionists', 'spies', 'traitors' and 'monsters and demons' cowering on the stage.

Occasionally the victims were made to sing on stage the self-abusive songs which they were compelled to sing on many other occasions, including the parade through the streets which sometimes preceded the Public Criticism Meeting:

> I am a criminal,
> I am a criminal,
> I am a monster and demon ...

No one thought that those who sang this enforced, formulaic self-degradation actually believed what the words, semantically, said. Nor did anyone think that the singers wanted others to believe this. Rather, the message which the words conveyed pragmatically was 'I am helpless, I am afraid, I will do whatever you tell me.' In this way the song of the victims complemented the discourse of the slogans, testifying to their intimidatory power.

Once the revolutionary people had proclaimed their power and ritually intimidated their victims, the formal criticisms began. Investigators, former colleagues, friends, even relatives mounted the stage to make their accusations. The speakers had been carefully selected, their speeches were always written in advance, and they had been told what to say. The language used was highly formulaic. For example, the first words always quoted Mao or echoed him, and they always referred pragmatically to the class struggle. Some people began with the famous quotation from the Little Red Book which was the standard justification of violence during the Cultural Revolution:

(1) *Geming bu shi qingke chifan, bu shi zuo wenzhang, bu shi huihua xiuhua. Geming shi baodong, shi yige jieji tuifan yige jieji de baolie xingdong.*
'A revolution is not a dinner party, it is not writing articles, it is not drawing pictures nor doing embroidery. Revolution is violence, it is the action of one class overthrowing another class.'

Others quoted verses of Mao's poetry which would be interpreted pragmatically as referring to revolution and class struggle:

(2) *Sihai fanteng yunshuinu,*
Wuzhou zhendang fengleiji.
'Four seas are turbulent, clouds and water are furious,
Five continents are shaking, wind and thunder are violent.'

Other common formulae were also taken directly from Mao's works or from Maoist newspapers which wrote in pidgin-Mao:

(3) *Bu po bu li.*
'Without destruction there can be no construction.'
(A direct quote from Mao).

(4) *Di shi di you shi you, women bixu huaqing jieji jiexian.*
'A foe is a foe, a friend is a friend, we must clearly distinguish one from the other.'
(Mao: 'Who are our enemies, who are our friends?.... To distinguish real friends from real enemies, we must ...' [LRB, 12]).

(5) *Na qi bi zuo dao qiang ...*
'Taking up the pen as a weapon I now expose ...'
(A stock phrase, Maoist in spirit, used as the opening words of a revolutionary song).

(6) *Shijie zai dongdang zhong qianjin ...*
'The world advances amidst turbulence ...'
(Maoist in spirit, copied from the official press).

(7) *Dongfeng jin chui, jiebao pin chuan.*
'The east wind blows with mighty power, news of victory keeps pouring in.'
(Mao: '...the East Wind is prevailing over the West Wind. That is to say, the forces of socialism have become overwhelmingly superior to the forces of imperialism.')

(8) *Guoneiwai xingshi yipai da hao.*
'The overall situation is glowing and excellent at home and abroad.'
(A standard formula, echoing Mao: 'The world is progressing, the future is bright ...' [LRB, 70]. Also: 'Our achievements are great, problems are quite a few, and the future is bright' [quoted Tiewes 1993, 311]).

(9) *Dangqian quanguo getiao zhanxian xingshi yipian da hao.*
'Now a good situation prevails on all fronts in our country.'
(Another variation on the same standard formula).

The last three formulae, of course, were used at the beginning of speeches which indicated that although the situation was excellent, there were dangers from people like those on the stage, who would therefore have to be crushed. These formulae were the first ingredient of a standard three-part recipe for 'reporting on the current situation':

> First, add Revolutionary Optimism: 'The revolutionary situation is excellent' (or an equivalent statement such as 'The situation now is very good, not just good', or those in 7-9 above).
>
> Second, add Revolutionary Vigilance: 'There are still problems caused by class enemies or by comrades who have committed "errors of thought".'
>
> Third, combine to form optimistic, Revolutionary Conclusion: 'The revolutionary masses must destroy the class enemies or correct those who have committed "errors of thought", so that the situation becomes even better.'

This recipe, copied from Mao (e.g. Mao 1927, 1949a, 1957), expressed the optimism and the revolutionary vigilance appropriate to revolutionaries guided by the Great Helmsman and armed with the 'magic weapon' of this Thought.

A striking feature of the nine formulae listed above is that they all include military terminology or martial metaphors. Even the apparently innocuous phrase 'the overall situation' in the last formula referred, pragmatically, to the situation in the class war; and no one would have missed the martial referents of the meteorological

metaphors in the second and seventh formulae. Such language encouraged militant action and symbolized the revolutionary might of the Cultural Revolution.

If the opening words of the speeches were highly formulaic, so were the words which followed. Before describing and denouncing the accused person's crimes, for example, speakers always quoted Mao's words to show that the behaviour of the accused was criminal, making his Thought the standard of right and wrong. There was no independent criterion by which the victims were judged, and no one ever cited any law which they had broken. 'In Communist China, there was no law independent of Party policy' (Cheng 1986, 444), and during the Cultural Revolution Party policy was legitimate only when it conformed to the Thought of Mao Zedong.

Even when the speakers did not quote Mao, they tried to echo his words and to use the conventional language of the Cultural Revolution. That language included a high proportion of words whose meanings were vague, general and abstract - words which might be termed *empty phraseology*. The following are examples:

> Nouns: *spirit, soul, revolution, class struggle, revisionism, enemy, destruction, construction.*
>
> Adjectives: *bourgeois, capitalist, indignant, militant, great, profound, revolutionary.*

The words 'spirit' and 'soul' had been co-opted from older religious traditions, and what they meant in the context of a revolutionary religion which was avowedly materialist and nominally atheistic was never explained. But Mao used these terms, so everyone else did too in a ritual display of linguistic conformity. Most of the other terms were 'materialist', but there was no agreement on their referents. In the case of the term 'revolutionary', for example, we saw in chapter 3 how Mao himself repeatedly switched the contextual assumptions which gave it empirical content; then when he lost control of the context of interpretation, people gave the word different referents and fought each other in the name of 'the revolution'. Exactly the same problem surrounded use of terms like 'class struggle' (was it a struggle against the bad classes, or a struggle against the new class of powerholders?),

'revisionism' (were we the revisionists or were our opponents?), 'destruction' (we all knew it was a good thing, but what did it refer to - what were we supposed to destroy?) and 'construction' (we all approved of it, but our 'construction' was the object of other people's 'destruction'). Everybody used these words, and used them repeatedly. People hurled them at their enemies, who hurled them back, giving them different referents. Clearly, the purpose of using these words was rarely to communicate. Rather, they were used ritually - they were formulae for showing a correct political attitude. They were words blessed by Mao, they represented the revolutionary fashion, and they were meant to demonstrate linguistically that one had repudiated the old world and was enthusiastically building the new.

The linguistic formulae of the Public Criticism Meeting included traditional four-character idioms, which were converted to revolutionary purposes. Those used regularly by speakers at Public Criticism meetings included:

bu huai haoyi
'harbour evil designs'
(Used with reference to opponents)

bu gong dai tian
'will not live under the same sky'
(Used to indicate irreconcilable conflict with opponents)

zuiwong zhiyi bu zai jiu
'the drinker's heart is not in the cup'
(Used to indicate that the accused had ulterior motives)

zuo gu you pan
'glance right and left'
(Used by speakers to describe people who 'sat on the fence'. The crimes of the accused were used to convince such people to commit themselves to the revolutionary side)

bao feng zhou yu
'violent wind and gusty rain'
(Used to describe the power and turmoil of the current political campaign)

tu zhi muo fen
'smear on rouge and powder'
(Try to make one's crimes seem less serious)

The traditional idioms were supplemented by a large number of stock, four-character phrases of more recent invention. These usually had more transparent meanings:

zui da e ji
'guilty of the most heinous crimes'

zuie leilei
'guilty of innumerable crimes'

zui gai wan si
'guilty of crimes for which one deserves ten thousand deaths'

zuowei zuofu
'tyrannically abuse one's power'

zuozei xinxu
'uneasy lies the head of one with a guilty conscience'

danzhan xinjing
'tremble with fear'

daizui ligong
'atone for one's crimes by doing good deeds'

bu da zi zhao
'confess without being pressed'
(Reveal one's crimes unintentionally)

bu ke kangju
'irresistible'
(Used with reference to Mao's Thought, the revolutionary masses, the Cultural Revolution, and so on)

chixin wangxiang
'wishful thinking'
(Used with reference to those who thought they could oppose Mao, the Cultural Revolution, and so on)

daoxing nishi
'go against the historical trend'
(Try to reverse the irresistible tide of revolution)

All of these expressions had been used time and again in the official media and in political speeches before the Cultural Revolution. They provided a rich resource for those who wanted to show their

revolutionary spirit by using the correct political formulae on any public or private occasion.

Towards the end of each criticism the speaker would begin to threaten the victim with intimidating formulae, including slogans. Once again, they were likely to include variations on the ubiquitous slogan-formula 'Down with NP!' Other concluding formulae included

Dui fangeming fenzi jue bu shi renzheng!
'Never mercy to counterrevolutionaries!'

Jue bu yunxu jiejidiren fangong daosuan!
'Never allow the class enemy to retaliate!'

Fang laoshidian!
'You behave yourself!'
(To a victim who had confessed fully to all the charges)

The audience did not remain silent throughout the speeches but was expected to signify its outrage at the crimes of the accused by chanting slogans. Similarly, while the victim was being interrogated, the crowd was expected to assist with chants like:

NP bixu tanbai jiaodai!
'NP must confess his (her) crime!'

NP bixu xiang geming qunzhong ditou renzui!
'NP must hang his (her) head and admit his (her) guilt to the revolutionary masses!'

NP bixu chedi tanbai jiaodai!
'NP must make a clean breast of his (her) crimes!'

Ditou renzui!
'Hang your head down and admit your guilt!'

Tanbai congkuan. Kangju congyan!
'Leniency to those who confess their crimes. Severity to those who refuse to!'

Fan dang fan renmin jue meiyou hao xiachang!
'Those who oppose the people and the Communist Party will come to no good end!'

Ni de muori jiu yao dao le!
'Your doomsday is near!'

Bu touxiang jiu jiao ni mie wang!
'Surrender to the people or die!'

Rang ta si wu zang shen zhi di!
'Let him die without burial ground!'

All of these slogans were intimidatory. They were ritually intended to frighten the accused into confession. I say 'ritually' because it was not expected that they would in fact be the actual *cause* of any confession which was forthcoming. Many victims did confess, sometimes reading from prepared statements, but that was because they had already been broken by interrogation, false promises of release, threats to their families, deprivation of sleep, or torture. Victims who had not already given up the fight were unlikely suddenly to 'come to their senses' during a Public Criticism Meeting.

Within the ritual formula of the interrogations, variations were possible. During the interrogation of the famous pianist Liu Shi-kun, for example, the crowd not only chanted slogans like 'Down with the Soviet Revisionist Spy, Down with Liu Shi-kun!' but it also sang a song:

Liu Shi-kun you bastard,
Now you can surrender,
If you do not tell the truth,
You may quickly die ...
(Liang & Shapiro 1983, 121).

Singing at this point was unusual, and it was even more unusual to sing words specially composed for the occasion. However, the song was consistent with the ritual structure of the Public Criticism Meeting. It used conventional threatening formulae and, both semantically and pragmatically, it fulfilled the same intimidatory function as the slogans.

What was said at the Public Criticism Meeting was supported by what was seen and what was done. The theme of Mao worship in the songs and slogans at the beginning and the end of the meeting was reinforced by the setting and ritual actions. There was always a large portrait of Mao on the wall behind the stage, and before and after their addresses all speakers bowed deeply twice, first towards the portrait and then towards the audience. Similarly, members of the audience

had to show their devotion to Mao's Thought by bringing their copies of the Little Red Book. During the Mao worship at the end of the meeting, they would hold their Little Red Books in their right hands as they shouted slogans.

The theme of class struggle was emphasised by banners and wall posters condemning the accused and the class enemies with whom they had aligned themselves. The accused themselves had placards hung from their necks announcing their crimes, and often they were made to wear the tall dunces' hats with which the peasants of Hunan had humiliated their landlords during an uprising in 1927. (They learned this by reading Mao 1927). Some had one side of their heads shaved in a 'yin-yang' haircut, and many bore the marks of torture, beatings and maltreatment. That maltreatment continued during the Public Criticism Meeting. Some had their arms forced above their heads from behind in the excruciatingly painful 'jet plane' position; some were struck by their guards or had their legs kicked from under them when they refused to confess or needed to be 'taught a lesson'; members of the audience sometimes stoned them and even got close enough to spit at them, kick them or punch them. People were not supposed to be killed at the meetings, but in a few cases that happened too (Cheng 1986, 252).

The inequality of power in this struggle between the revolutionary masses and their helpless victims was expressed in the custom of forcing the latter to hang their heads down as low as possible. In Chinese tradition, this was a sign of admitting one's mistakes and of being willing to receive criticism and punishment; it was also a sign of submission and obedience. Here, we find a case of a social custom that was taken over for revolutionary purposes. In pre-revolutionary times it was the young and the workers and peasants who had to hang their heads. During the Cultural Revolution the roles were reversed, for such people were the least likely to be dragged before a Public Criticism Meeting. Those made to bow their heads were mostly intellectuals, cadres, members of the black categories, former capitalists and people whose foreign connections led to accusations that they were spies. These people had once enjoyed prestige or power, and Mao saw them as past or present obstacles to his vision of a revolutionary China

in which he had no rivals - a society in which everyone acted in accordance with his Thought. So he turned society upside down, giving power to those whom he thought could never challenge him. In the Public Criticism Meetings, they humiliated Mao's old enemies, the capitalists and the black categories, and his potential challengers, the intellectuals and the cadres. Such people were the principal victims of the Cultural Revolution.

Both the individual rituals of the Public Criticism Meeting and its overall structure were part of the Maoist discourse which inspired the Cultural Revolution. That discourse deified Mao and made his Thought the sole arbiter of right and wrong. It divided the world into two classes of people: Mao's loyal followers, desperate to make revolution in his name, and those who aligned themselves with class enemies in defiance of his Thought. In thus dichotomizing Chinese society into the good (revolutionaries) and the bad (anti-revolutionaries), the linguistic rituals of the Public Criticism Meeting owed more to the struggle meetings of the early 1950s than to the Communist Party's tradition of internal criticism and self-criticism. They were the rituals of Mao-inspired combat against the class enemy, not the rituals of comradely criticism, repentance and redemption. The audience at Public Criticism Meetings might have shouted 'Leniency to those who confess their crimes. Severity to those who refuse', but this was a threat, not a promise of forgiveness. Confession brought no forgiveness, but only further interrogation and perhaps torture. Victims were dragged before Public Criticism Meetings time after time so that the audience could internalize Mao's Thought by attacking those who had flouted its principles. The objective was to educate the masses politically, not to convert the accused. At the same time, criminals who were required for exhibition at Public Criticism Meetings could not be killed like the class enemies of the early 1950s. So the Public Criticism Meetings departed from the model of the struggle meetings, just as they departed from the tradition of redemptive criticism and self-criticism. In their rhetoric and in their practice, they were a unique product of the Cultural Revolution.

4.3 Conflict, Mao-worship and the Ideal World of the Formulae

Mao's control of China was built on conflict. He divided the population into opposing groups, then he mobilized most of these groups in turn, getting them to purge other groups who in any way were suspected of straying from his Thought or from whatever policies he currently favoured. Before the Cultural Revolution, he had repeatedly mobilized the red categories against the black categories and the capitalists. He had mobilized those who had not spoken out during the 'Hundred Flowers' campaign against those who had, who henceforth constituted a new category liable to persecution - the Rightists. He used the prejudices of those who were merely 'red' (revolutionary but without other qualifications) against those who were 'expert' (scientists, technicians, and all manner of intellectuals). He used the Party to discipline the workers and peasants, then had the central Party organs despatch 'work teams' which pressured the peasants into exposing the faults and revolutionary shortcomings of local cadres. Then, when he no longer trusted the Party to control the country and reform itself, he launched the greatest conflict of all - the Cultural Revolution.

It has often been pointed out that by instigating these conflicts Mao kept potential opponents divided. It has been less widely appreciated, however, that conflict provided a crucial mechanism for promoting competitive Mao-worship. Every group which mobilized did so in Mao's name, while those who were attacked had to defend themselves by professing undying loyalty to their Great Leader. Moreover, the constant fear of attack led people to scrutinize their own activities, lest they be singled out during the next mobilization. This process of 'continuous revolution' plunged China repeatedly into political and economic chaos, but it produced ideological stability - a conflict-driven consensus that Mao was China's One True God and that his Thought was the criterion of right and wrong.

Many verbal rituals of the Cultural Revolution, especially those embodied in the Public Criticism Meeting, expressed the unending conflicts of Chinese society. They did not, however, have the 'safety valve' function which Gluckman ascribes to the 'rites of rebellion' in

tribal societies where social tensions are ritually dramatized and ultimately diffused (Gluckman 1963, 110-36). In Mao's China, conflict was officially encouraged, for it was the mechanism by which class enemies were suppressed and all other sections of the community were made to confront their political mistakes and 'errors of thought'. So the rituals in fact promoted such conflict, integrated it into their structure, and provided a model for the suppression of class enemies and the punishment of those guilty of 'errors of thought'. At the same time, the rituals affirmed that loyalty to Mao was beyond question. They did not do this in order to '[cloak] the fundamental disharmonies of social structure' (Gluckman 1965, 265), but to express revolutionary commitment to the Great Helmsman who had ordained those disharmonies and in whose name they fought. The rituals celebrated Mao and the doctrines of class conflict which underpinned the competitive Mao-worship of people who feared attack if they worshipped less ardently than the most extreme zealots. The rituals were part of the system which kept the Chinese people subject as never before to a single emperor-god.

The verbal rituals of the Cultural Revolution encoded the ideal power structure of Chinese society. That structure featured just three central players. At the top, there was the Great Leader Chairman Mao, whose brilliance, wisdom, benevolence and inspirational leadership were celebrated in countless formulae. Below him, the formulae focused on two groups: 'the people', devoted to Mao and guided by his revolutionary Thought, and 'the enemy' who plotted against him and resisted his message. The people and the enemy were locked in mortal combat, and the people were sure to win because they were armed with the 'mighty weapon' of Mao's Thought.

In the world of the formulae, Mao was the only god. Only one other individual is mentioned by name - Mao's deputy and designated successor Lin Biao. His name occurs just once, and then only because he was Mao's 'close comrade-in-arms':

> Wishing our great leader Chairman Mao an infinitely long life, and his close comrade-in-arms good health forever!

Lin was the high priest of Mao-worship, who had won his leader's favour with sedulous sycophancy. In almost everyone's eyes, he was Mao's most devoted follower and, as he himself put it, Mao's 'good student'. Lin's high position was entirely conditional upon his unswerving loyalty to Mao's line.

If the formulae mention hardly any individual except Mao, they pay only a little more attention to the Communist Party, which before the Cultural Revolution had formed a powerful intermediate stratum which interpreted Mao's word to 'the people'. Because Mao aimed the Cultural Revolution partly at 'persons in authority following the capitalist road' within the Party, calling upon the revolutionary masses to scrutinize the Party's fidelity to his Thought, it no longer served as the rallying point for his loyal followers. It still rated the occasional formulaic mention, as in the slogan 'Those who oppose the people and the Communist Party will come to no good end', but it was understood that this referred only to members who were *true* Communists, faithful to the letter and spirit of Mao's Thought. Most people solved the problem of the Party's ambiguous status by dropping all formulaic references to it, pledging allegiance instead to the Party Central Committee - the 'Party Centre' for short:

> *Jin gen Mao Zhuxi wei shou de dangzhongyang!*
> 'Follow the Chairman Mao led Central Committee!'
>
> *Baowei dangzhongyang!*
> 'Defend the Party Centre!'
>
> *Shisi baowei dangzhongyang!*
> 'Pledge to fight to the death in defending the Party Central Committee!'

Mao was Chairman of the Central Committee, and in identifying it with Mao and making it the focus of their loyalty the Red Guards were not mistaken. In August 1966 Mao had persuaded the Central Committee to accept the Party's suicide note, the 'Sixteen Points'. Thereafter, his opponents ceased to attend its meetings, they were progressively purged, and the Committee itself for a time became moribund while Mao issued directives in its name. People whose only allegiance was to Mao could safely pledge themselves to the 'Party Centre'.

In the ideal world of the formulae, there was no fixed hierarchy between Mao and his revolutionary people: his Thought was the criterion of right and wrong, and everyone's fate depended upon fidelity to that Thought. The people, armed with the 'invincible weapon' of his Thought, were certain to detect and destroy the 'capitalist roaders', 'counter-revolutionaries', 'revisionists', 'spies' and 'traitors' in high places who quoted Mao while betraying his revolutionary cause. It was an 'ideal world' which bore only a tangential relationship to the real world, but the vision of society which it expressed motivated many millions of people to revolutionary activity. That vision was combined with the principles of interpretation given to the Chinese people by Yao Wenyuan and Mao Zedong which we discussed in Chapter 3, and the combination was lethal. 'Revisionism' could be read into the words and actions of anybody at all, and even somebody who spoke only in Mao-quotes could be accused of 'waving the red flag to oppose the red flag'. No one was safe. The outcome, of course, was that those who were victims of the Cultural Revolution were on the whole as loyal to Mao and his Thought as those who accused them. The self-serving Lin Biao, who manipulated the revolutionary formulae and the Mao/Yao principles of interpretation to eliminate his opponents and win Mao's favour, was far less loyal than people like Liu Shaoqi whom he helped to destroy on his path to the top. In that respect, the Cultural Revolution was an exercise in futility. What it did do, however, was make people more afraid than ever before that they might be suspected of anti-revolutionary thoughts or actions. So they polished their displays of revolutionary ardour and recited revolutionary formulae in an often futile attempt to keep themselves safe. Mao reaped an increased show of loyalty, although perhaps no more of the substance.

4.4 Control, Self-Annihilation, Liberation and the Formulae

Mao always professed to value the independent thinker, to admire the person who would stand up to the powerful and point out their errors and faults. He was fond of calling upon Party members to emulate Hai Rui, the courageous Ming dynasty official who criticised the emperor

and was dismissed as a result. Mao issued such calls, for example, at the Lushan conference which debated the Great Leap Forward in 1959, and had even given a biography of Hai Rui to the defence minister, Peng Dehuai, to encourage him to speak out. But to welcome criticism in principle was not to like it in practice, and Mao confessed privately that 'he feared he might not be able to bear criticism if it was offered.' (Teiwes 1993, liii). His fears were well founded, for while he could criticise himself he could never tolerate criticism from others. When Peng Dehuai wrote Mao a private letter praising the Great Leap Forward but respectfully pointing out that there were deficiencies in its implementation, Mao attacked him publicly, forced him to write an abject self-criticism, dismissed him from his position and had him placed under house-arrest. He then launched a purge of all those whom he thought might support Peng, branding them 'Right Opportunists'.

At the 7,000 Cadres Conference in 1962, Mao again called for 'Hai Ruis' to come forward. This time the person foolish enough to respond was Liu Shaoqi, who praised the overall success of the Great Leap Forward, then angered Mao by attacking its shortcomings. Mao's confidence in Liu was seriously eroded. He preferred the sycophancy of Lin Biao, who told the conference, 'If we encounter any problems, any difficulty, it is because we have not followed the instructions of the Chairman closely enough, because we ignored or circumscribed the Chairman's advice.' Mao commented, 'What a good speech Vice-Chairman Lin has made. Lin Biao's words are always so clear and direct. They are simply superb! Why can't the other Party leaders be so perceptive?' (Becker 1996, 244; Yan & Gao 1986, 190; Teiwes 1993, xxxix-xli, 374).

If Mao was unable to tolerate dissent from his most senior colleagues, he was certainly not prepared to let people lower down the hierarchy think for themselves - unless, of course, they independently agreed with him on everything which mattered. It was Mao's insistence on absolute adherence to his Thought which underpinned the exceptional importance of formulae in China during his rule. Originality was dangerous, so people began to keep themselves safe by

quoting him, by using stock phrases which echoed his words, and by effusively repeating the standard formulae of worship.

Use of the formulae had other important functions. One was legitimating Mao's rule. Since the formulae all glorified Mao, embodied his Thought or attacked his opponents, people who repeated them gave public approval to his supremacy, irrespective of their private opinions. When a whole nation recited the formulae in repeated acts of collective worship, China seemed to be what its official title proclaimed: a *People's* Republic with a revolutionary ruler loved and respected by all. Foreigners were supposed to be impressed, and some were. People in China were impressed, too. Anyone there who had doubts about Mao felt isolated, for everyone else seemed to adore him.

Even those who hated Mao were forced to use the formulae and worship him. For these people, the formulae were an ongoing lesson in the realities of power. No matter what their views, they spoke the language of Mao-worship, becoming revolutionary role models for their children, their friends and everyone who respected them. The pervasiveness of the formulae ensured that even Mao's opponents engaged constantly in activities which consolidated his rule.

Repetition of the formulae also helped Mao's cause by deploying positive and negative terms in ways which promoted higher order conditioning. The word 'Mao', for example, was always associated with titles and adjectives like 'Chairman', 'Great Leader', 'Great Helmsman', 'the sun', 'love', 'long live', 'red', 'revolutionary', 'brilliant', 'infallible', 'invincible', and so on. By contrast, the names of those being criticised were always slotted into formulae which linked them with words having the very worst connotations: 'Down with', 'capitalist roader', 'revisionist', 'traitor', 'spy', 'monster and demon', 'black', 'futile', and the like. As we saw in Chapter 1, anyone or anything repeatedly associated with positive words will tend to be well regarded by those who exposed to the association, and anyone or anything repeatedly associated with negative words will tend to be poorly regarded.

Oral formulae were an extremely effective method of spreading Mao's Thought in a population which still had a high percentage of

illiterate peasants and workers. The formulae could be learned from the loudspeakers which blared revolutionary messages in markets, workplaces and residential areas throughout most of China. Moreover, because they were short, stereotyped and easy to remember, they could be passed from person to person, then reinforced by ensuring that people used them as often as possible. The effect of constant repetition was that the formulae became well-drilled foci of a wider body of inter-related political knowledge - the foci of schematic assumptions about Mao, Mao's Thought, revolution, socialism, capitalism, revisionism, class enemies, and so on. As we saw in Chapter 1, use of any assumption in a schema tends to activate linked assumptions, putting them 'on call'. Repetition of the formulae therefore constantly activated the basic assumptions of Maoist political discourse, making them easier to retrieve and use in classifying and analysing people and events. Since the Chinese people were, as far as possible, denied access to alternative assumptions, most began to see the world at least partly through the lens of the formulae and associated political concepts.

Finally, adherence to the formulae ensured that the same message was delivered in the same words every time. After a while, speakers became so practised that they could compose and deliver the message when half asleep, and hearers could identify the formula and understand the message almost as soon as the speaker had started. Speaking in formulae therefore made fewer demands on the cognitive resources of both speaker and hearer than delivering the same message in different words every time. Since the messages of Maoist propaganda were generally simple, not to say simplistic, they could often be expressed in formulae. Because those formulae were used at every opportunity, processing costs were reduced and relevance, in Sperber and Wilson's (1995) sense, was correspondingly enhanced.

The more people could be made to speak formulaically and through that learn to *think* formulaically, the more they would become mere ciphers of the formulae. In the ideal world of the formulae, all individuality, all *merely personal* aspirations would be destroyed. Indeed, that is precisely what the official media preached. Self-criticism (*ziwo piping*) had been part of the Chinese Communist tradition since the Yan'an days, but from early in the Cultural

Revolution it was supplanted by something far more drastic. In the pages of the official press the Chinese people were urged to proceed beyond mere self-criticism and to practise 'self-revolution' (*ziwo geming*):

> [We] should make ourselves the target of revolution, frequently engage in self-criticism, and incessantly wage revolution against ourselves. [*People's Daily*, 3 Nov. 1966, quoted Chuang 1967, 39].

In this context 'I', 'the self' (*wo*) became a symbol of 'bourgeois egocentrism'. So everyone had to 'vanquish the word "I"' (*dou dao wo zi*) or even 'smash the word "I"' (*ya sui wo zi*), for 'if one could utterly ignore *wo*, one would dare to climb a mountain of swords and jump into a sea of fire'. (*People's Daily*, 2 Jan., 15 April, 3 June, 2 Nov. 1966, quoted Chuang 1967, 39). Mao had told his followers, in words which they all knew by heart, 'first, fear not hardship; second, fear not death', and in that spirit they recited the formulae of revolutionary self-annihilation:

> *Po si li gong*
> 'Renounce oneself to serve others'
>
> *Dang de xuyao jiu shi wo de xuyao*
> 'The party's need is my need'
>
> *Wei renmin liyi er si, jiu bi taishan hai zhong*
> 'To die for the people is far weightier than mount Tai'
>
> *Tou ke duan, xue ke liu, geming jingshen bu ke diu*
> 'The head can be cut off, blood can be shed, but the revolutionary spirit cannot be forsaken!'

What gave these formulae power was that they were linked schematically to assumptions drilled into all young Chinese by their education. In the classroom, in their storybooks, in magazines and newspapers, they had been exposed repeatedly to stories about models of self-sacrifice. They ranged from the poor soldier Lei Feng, who invariably subordinated his own interests to those of other people, to heroines who died by torture rather than betray secrets to the Guomindang or the Japanese imperialists. The moral of this propaganda that the highest form of dedication to the revolution was to die a martyr's death, and some young people found the prospect

attractive. One former Red Guard, who had fought as a Rebel in Guilin, described his feelings of idealistic self-renunciation to Anita Chan:

> My friends and I likened life to a box of matches. If you light the matches one by one they give off only a small flame. But if you set afire the whole box it gives off a flare far bigger, even though the quantity of matches is the same. We felt that to die a hero would be like burning the whole box of matches. So we thought that if there was a grand occasion for which we could die, then dying would be transformed into a happy thing ... We talked about not leading a useless life ... It was best not to die of sickness. The best way was when surging forward on a battlefield, dying in a big way, a worthwhile cause .... Talking about it now, it was really mad to look at death so lightly. But during the Cultural Revolution we thought it was for defending Chairman Mao. [Chan 1985, 141-2].

This was life lived in the spirit of the formulae: when these Red Guards said 'Pledge to fight to the death to defend Mao Zedong's Thought!' they really meant it.

It would be a mistake, however, to focus simply on the role of the formulae in constraining and persuading. Catherine Bell argues that ritual constructs 'relations of domination and participation', but that those relations 'empower those who may at first appear to be controlled by them.' (Bell 1992, 197, 207). We may doubt whether this applies to all rituals or to all who take part in them, but it certainly applies to the people who participated voluntarily in the rituals of the Cultural Revolution. Participation in Public Criticism Meetings, for example, gave young Red Guards and Rebel workers both the feeling and the reality of power as they ritually and sometimes physically subdued those to whom they had once deferred - teachers, intellectuals, technical experts, managers, party cadres and the old. Chanting slogans in unison, they not only took courage from their comrades who shouted with them, but from their common devotion to Mao's Thought:

> Every one of us is an aweless hero. We fear neither heaven nor earth only because we have the invincible weapon of Mao Zedong's Thought, because we have the never-setting red sun - our great beloved Chairman Mao - in our hearts. Mao Zedong Thought is our lifeblood. [*Shoudu Hongqi Chiweijun xuanyan. RGP* vol. 19, p. 6084].

This quotation is, like a million others which I could have chosen, a pastiche of clichés, and it contains two stock epithets for Mao's Thought: 'an invincible weapon' (*buke zhansheng de wuqi*) and 'our lifeblood' (*sheng ming xian*). In other constantly recurring phrases, that Thought was:

dengta
'a lighthouse'

zhinanzhen
'a compass'

zhilu mingdeng
'a bright lantern lighting up the road'

wangyuanjing he xianweijing
'a telescope and microscope'

huochetou
'a locomotive'

zuihao de wuqi
'the best weapon'

jingshen yuanzidan
'a spiritual atom bomb'

Most commonly of all, it was a *fabao* (supernatural weapon, magic weapon). The term was borrowed from traditional popular fiction, where it designates 'a powerful, supernatural weapon that supposedly can easily defeat any well-equipped enemy or crush a whole army outright.' (Chuang 1967, 36-7). During the Cultural Revolution, news reports were filled with stories of the miracles worked by Mao's Thought, some conveniently collected in *The Miracles of Chairman Mao* (Urban 1971), and there were repeated claims that soldiers in the People's Liberation Army believed that 'the best weapon is not airplanes, nor big cannons, nor tanks, nor atomic bombs; the best weapon is Mao Tse-Tung's thought.' (*People's Daily*, 3 Jan. 1966, quoted Chuang 1967, 37). According to the acting Chief of Staff, 'all the commanders and fighters of our army ... take Chairman Mao's works as the orientation for all work, the telescope and microscope for observing the world, the indispensable food, weapon and combat-wheel for life, work and combat, and the all-powerful magic weapon for

surmounting all difficulties and defeating all enemies.' (*Guangming Daily*, 2 August 1966, quoted Chuang 1967, 37). So when Red Guards ritually recited quotations from the Little Red Book and shouted slogans proclaiming their faith in Mao, their words stood for concepts which were linked schematically to assumptions derived from a thousand reports about how Mao's Thought had helped achieve the impossible. The power of the slogans stemmed from the strength of the assumptions to which they were linked.

The Red Guards' feelings of empowerment and liberation were, of course, promoted as well by a transformation in their position within the power structures of Chinese society. Once Mao had given them his support, few felt able to stand against them. They, under Mao, were the new lords of Chinese society. 'Red Guard masters!' shrieked one of their victims as she banged her forehead on the floor in a desperate kowtow. 'I swear I do not have a portrait of Chiang Kai-shek! I swear I do not!' (Chang 1992, 406). Even Liu Shaoqi had to treat them as 'masters', because they acted in Mao's name. As they swaggered astride their one-time superiors, their ideology and their language reflected their new-found dominance. Liu had told them that they should be 'the docile tool of the Party', but once so many in the Party were unmasked as 'capitalist-roaders', this instruction was attacked as part of Liu's plan to use the Party to spread revisionism. Instead, the Red Guards relied upon a quote from a speech which Mao made in 1939, unknown until it was rescued from obscurity and published in the *People's Daily* when the Cultural Revolution made it useful (Chuang 1967, 14):

> The tens of thousands of aspects of Marxism can be summarized with one sentence: It is right to revolt.

Zaofan, the term for 'revolt', means literally 'to cause upsets'. Traditionally it had bad connotations, for it was linked with sedition and treason as well as simple revolt. After the Communists came to power it retained those connotations, and as late as 22 June 1966 the *People's Daily* published an article entitled 'Smash the Broken Trumpet that Incites the Reactionaries to *Zaofan*' (Chuang 1967, 14). With the publication of the new quotation from Mao, however, the connotations of the term were transformed. Revolt suddenly became legitimate,

indeed mandatory when directed against reactionaries. By the beginning of 1967, *zaofan* had become synonymous with *geming* (revolution), and was sometimes combined with it to form the double compound *geming zaofan* (Chuang 1967, 14).

As befitted those engaged in revolt, the Red Guards revelled in titles which expressed their courage, their independence and their historic role. Sometimes they were termed *xiao jiang* ('little generals'), at other times *chuang jiang* ('bold generals', 'daredevils') or *xin ren* ('new people' - a revolutionary generation uncorrupted by life in pre-revolutionary China) (Chuang 1967, 10-13). Their favourite self-description, however, grew out of Mao's specification in 1957 of five criteria for *geming jiebanren* ('revolutionary successors' who would carry the revolutionary torch into the future). The red-class Red Guards, having been commissioned to create Mao's new socialist order by destroying the Four Olds and creating the Four News, naturally assumed that they had been chosen by Mao as his 'revolutionary successors' – an assumption reinforced by the self-serving doctrine of 'natural redness' which so many of them accepted. Then when the 'Rebel' Red Guards received their commission to safeguard the revolution by purging the Party, they assumed that *they* were the chosen ones. As a result, all Red Guards, whatever their factional allegiance, gloried in the title 'revolutionary successors'.

For the Red Guards, intoxicated with idealism, power and self-importance, the formulae were more liberating than constraining. Even the demand to annihilate the *wo*, the 'I', was used to inspire action which not only served 'the revolution' but expanded their own power as well. Such action made them feel worthy of the title 'revolutionary successors' and it won the admiration of those who wished they could be as brave. The formulae served Mao above all others, but they also served the revolutionaries who gained strength from them, who knew how to manipulate them and who controlled their pragmatic interpretation.

4.5 Reference Assignment, Victims and Mao's Responsibility

Charged with the responsibility of making revolution in accordance with Mao's Thought, the 'revolutionary successors' sought motivation from the formulae. One formula consisted of the 'Five Dares' and the 'Four Unafraids': dare to think, to speak, to do, to make revolution and to rebel; be unafraid of heaven, earth, gods and ghosts. Of these, 'daring to speak' - or at least to speak independently - was by far the most difficult, for the Red Guards like everyone else were afraid to say anything which might conceivably be taken as a departure from Mao's Thought. So when they dedicated themselves to the Five Dares and the Four Unafraids, they often did so in speeches based on recent editorials in the *People's Daily* and *Red Flag* (cf. Ling 1972, 38).

When it came to 'daring to do', however, the Red Guards were less constrained and often not at all formulaic. The reason was, of course, that the formulae had no clear implications for action: they were multi-faceted, sometimes contradictory, and they had to be interpreted with the aid of contextual assumptions which varied from person to person. Only one thing was agreed: in the context of Mao's instructions, the formulae were rallying cries in a war against largely unspecified 'people in authority' and class enemies. This legitimated the Red Guards' conquest of new empires and their acquisition of vast, new realms of self-determination and freedom.

For the victims of the Red Guards' conquests, the formulae had more damaging implications. They could interpret the slogans and quotations however they wished, but their interpretations did not matter. People more powerful than themselves had named *them* as the referents of the Cultural Revolution's formulae of condemnation: they were the 'capitalist roaders', the 'revisionists', the 'counterrevolutionaries', the 'spies', the 'traitors', the 'monsters and demons'. They could, perhaps, derive consolation from a few formulae like 'fear not hardship ... fear not death', but this was psychologically difficult because they associated so many of the formulae with interrogation and intimidation. They had become victims of the Cultural Revolution because they had been unable to control the

process of reference assignment, and the formulae brought them no liberation, only oppression.

Few of those accused believed that they had said or done anything which justified the criminal labels placed on them. The only important exception, and no more than a partial one, was 'people in authority' like Liu Shaoqi who confessed to 'errors of thought' - most of them errors constructed by Mao's repeated switches of the context of interpretation after August 1962. However, many others confessed to crimes which they knew they had never committed, worn down by interminable questioning, false promises, beatings and torture. Once Mao had died and the Gang of Four had been arrested it became at last safe to complain, and nearly all those who had been victimized stopped pretending that they accepted the judgment of their tormentors. They demanded rehabilitation and compensation, they revealed the petty motives which had often led to their selection as targets, they tried to fathom the 'madness' of the Cultural Revolution and they poured out their anger in the avalanche of 'wounded literature' which recounted their experiences (e.g. Barmé & Lee 1979; Feng 1991). Incessant bombardment with the formulae of the Cultural Revolution had helped to intimidate them and make them conform, but it had not convinced them that what their captors said was true.

While Mao lived, and often for much longer, few victims of the Cultural Revolution blamed him for their fate. Instead, they pointed the finger at those who had made false accusations, at those who had twisted and misinterpreted their words, at the Red Guards, at the Central Cultural Revolution Group, at Lin Biao, or at Jiang Qing and her court. Mao, they thought, did not know what sorts of things were done in his name. One reason they so seldom blamed Mao was that the Mao-cult had done its work only too well. Mao was so remote from their lives that they knew him mainly through the formulae. They simply could not believe that their Great Leader, the red sun in their hearts, was responsible for such injustice.

In one very narrow sense they were right: with the exception of Liu Shaoqi, whom Mao identified indirectly in his big character poster of 5 August 1966, no victim of the Cultural Revolution was publicly

singled out by Mao as a 'capitalist roader' or anything else. Indeed, only a relatively small number of very senior victims had their persecution specifically endorsed in the official press. The overwhelming majority of victims were singled out by those who bore them grudges, by those who wanted their jobs, by those who suspected them because they were intellectuals or had 'bad' class origins, by those who resented the cadres as a 'new class', by those who hunted down people connected with those already accused, by those who searched for opportunities to apply the Mao/Yao principles of interpretation, by those who detected something 'bourgeois' in their dress or lifestyle, or simply by those who wanted to avoid suspicion that they themselves lacked revolutionary ardour.

Mao was directly responsible for none of these individual cases. His writings, his instructions and the formulae of class war which echoed his words named only the *categories* of criminals who had to be rooted out. Moreover, as we have seen, the terms used to specify those categories were semantically incomplete, and that made it necessary for the accusers to use their own interpretive assumptions in the process of reference assignment. Those assumptions, of course, usually varied according to the accuser's class background, personal loyalties and individual prejudices. The accused, however, rarely shared the assumptions which led to their identification as 'monsters and demons' or any of the other types of criminal listed in the formulae. Most never dreamed that they were the sorts of people who were Mao's intended victims, and they blamed their accusers for maliciously pinning false labels on them. So Mao was shielded from blame because the semantically incomplete nature of the formulae and the pragmatic nature of reference assignment ensured that others had to make the final choice of targets.

The victims, of course, let Mao off too easily. He may not have named individuals, but he encouraged the process of persecution as a whole and sought to manipulate it for his own purposes. The witch-hunt was essential to his goal of breaking the power of the Communist Party, and it was equally essential to his attempt at bringing about a revolution in the Chinese people's values through mass criticism, the destruction of the Old and the fostering of the New. If innocent people

were amongst those accused, he simply did not care: in the words of a formula of the Cultural Revolution, he was prepared to 'kill the monkey to scare the chickens'. As Dittmer has argued, the whole process of mass criticism 'entailed the distortion or fabrication of criticisms ... in order to teach lessons not always related to the views of the target.' (Dittmer 1974, 314).

Mao also actively fostered many of the assumptions which were used in the process of reference assignment. As we saw in Chapter 3, Mao himself was responsible for the new interpretive assumptions which were used to accuse Liu and many other Party leaders of betraying socialism and suppressing the Cultural Revolution. We saw, too, how he was closely associated with the dissemination, through Yao Wenyuan, of principles of interpretation which could be used to accuse anyone of anti-revolutionary sentiments. We have seen that he himself deliberately fostered assumptions which made many people search for counterrevolutionaries amongst the black categories, the intellectuals, the bourgeoisie and the petit-bourgeoisie. We have seen, too, that all of this was fundamental to his policy of dividing the Chinese people into groups which purged each other in his name. So if Mao did not determine that a particular accuser should use one set of damaging interpretive assumptions rather than another, he certainly did a great deal to ensure that there were so many damaging assumptions available for use in the first place. Similarly, while he may not have been responsible for the fact that a particular individual made a false accusation so as not to seem lacking in revolutionary fervour, he created the system of competitive revolutionary activism which placed enormous pressure on people to prove their revolutionary commitment and secure their own safety by criticising and 'exposing' others. Mao may not have named the people who became the targets of revolutionary formulae during the Cultural Revolution, but he ensured that they, or millions like them, would be condemned. Formulae which reflected his Thought provided the condemnatory labels, and he himself created the main features of their most important contexts of interpretation.

CHAPTER 5

DICHOTOMIES, DEMONS AND VIOLENCE

5.1 Linguistic Dichotomies: the Symbolism of Good and Evil

The language of the Cultural Revolution was a language of worship, a language of hatred and a language of war. As a language of worship, it unified the people at the feet of the god-like Mao. As a language of hatred and of war, it drew a line between the people and the class enemy and used carefully scripted terms of abuse to humiliate and frighten the foe. It achieved all this partly through elaborating a series of interrelated dichotomies of good and evil. These drew upon the Communist Party's traditional imagery, but they adapted it and added to it the language of China's ancient tradition of curse sorcery. The result was a terrifying language of intimidation which influenced the attitudes of those who used it and devastated those who were its victims.

The architects of the dichotomies were Mao himself, who originated some of the dichotomies and whose writings were mined for imagery; his wife, Jiang Qing, leader of the cultural radicals, who launched the attack on 'Three Family Village' in 1966 and for a time influenced PLA propaganda; Chen Boda, Mao's secretary and the Chairman of the Central Cultural Revolution Group, who wrote some of Mao's speeches, spearheaded the takeover of the *People's Daily* in 1966 and had heavy responsibilities for superintending the press; Yao Wenyuan, whose attack on Wu Han had launched the Cultural Revolution; and Qi Benyu, radical historian, journalist and the main author of the attacks on the Beijing Municipal Committee and Liu Shaoqi. All of them, except for Mao himself, belonged to the Central Cultural Revolution Group. They controlled the *People's Daily* as well as the Party journal *Red Flag*, which had Chen Boda and then Yao Wenyuan as editor-in-chief. For a time, through Jiang Qing and Lin Biao, they also had ready access to the *Liberation Army Daily*. Through these 'two newspapers and one journal' they exercised indirect control

over the provincial Party press, which followed their lead for fear of taking an incorrect line. The provincial newspapers reprinted many of their articles and were in fact compelled to carry the title article from *Red Flag* on their front pages. As a result, the Central Cultural Revolution Group was in a position to dictate the language of the official press throughout the country. The independent Red Guard press, while difficult to control in matters of content, followed the lead of the official press in its language. So the whole Chinese press used the same, centrally directed language of class war. (On the above, cf. Liu 1971, 73, 78-84; Dittmer 1987; Wang 1996).

The rhetoric which these symbol-makers of the Cultural Revolution devised was formed around a fundamental dichotomy between words associated with the World of Light and words associated with the World of Darkness (Dittmer 1977; 1987, 80-90). The all-pervasive metaphor of the forces of light was the colour red (*hong*), which derived its symbolic power from both traditional and revolutionary associations. Traditionally, it was the colour of joy, success, popularity, good fortune and prosperity. Brides, for example, usually dressed at least partly in red, and red decorations were customarily present at weddings or at auspicious celebrations. After the communist victory, red acquired even more potent associations. In the Marxist tradition, it was the colour of socialism and the colour of sacrifice for the revolutionary cause. In China it became as well a symbol of love for Mao and of devotion to his revolutionary Thought.

During the Cultural Revolution the cult of the colour red went to extremes. As mass enthusiasm swelled, people began to paint all walls red, creating 'a red sea' (*hong haiyang*), although the practice was banned partly because the red areas became sacred and therefore unavailable for critical big character posters (*CCP Documents*, 146; Dittmer & Chen, 57). The colour red set the theme of all public functions. At a rally of 'revolutionary students and teachers' in Beijing in August 1966, for example,

> countless red flags waved in the breeze in Tiananmen square. Tens of thousands of Red Guards wearing red arm bands and carrying red-covered *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong* sang with gusto 'Sailing the Seas Depends on the Helmsman' and other revolutionary songs. The whole square became a surging

ocean of red. [*People's Daily*, 1 Sept. 1966, quoted in Dittmer 1977, 74, emphasis added].

The cult of the colour red was matched by the cult of the word 'red'. Mao's revolutionary line was the 'red line' (*hongxian*), his directives were 'red words' (*hongzi*), the power of the revolutionary masses was 'red power' (*hongse zhengquan*), their revolutionary action was a 'red storm' (*hongse fenbao*) or a 'red torrent' (*hongse jiliu*), they inflicted what they proudly called a 'red terror' (*hongse kongbu*) on the black categories, and when they expelled them from Beijing their objective was to make the capital 'purer and redder' (*geng chun geng hong*). (*RGP* vol. 5, p. 1035, vol. 16 pp. 5000, 5005, 5008, vol. 19, p. 6069). The urge to use the word 'red' in every possible context even led to the character for *hong* ('red'), hitherto nearly always adjectival, now also being used more often as a verb: 'let the socialist flowers redden all over the world' (*hong bian ren jian*). (Chuang 1967, 8, quoting *People's Daily*, 17 July 1966).

Mao himself, as the inspiration and guide of all revolutionary action, was the reddest object of all, the 'sun' (*taiyang*). He was the 'red, red sun' in the Chinese people's hearts and often the 'reddest red sun'. He was even, as people searched desperately for adequate superlatives, the 'reddest, reddest, red sun'. His Thought, which sustained all his followers, was a 'red lantern' (*hongdeng*) and his faithful followers were 'red flowers (*honghua*) who always turn towards the sun'. He was also the inspiration of a sub-theme in the imagery of light, for his followers were quick to note that as early as 1930 he had used the Chinese proverb 'A single spark can start a prairie fire' to argue that small acts of rebellion would rapidly develop into mighty revolutions (Mao 1930, 118, 121). Borrowing the metaphor, they vowed to 'spread the sparks of revolutionary rebelling', they threatened their enemies with 'the blazing flames of revolution', they lit 'the flames of criticism' and they spoke of how revolutionaries were steeled and matured in 'the furnaces of the great Cultural Revolutionary ... crucible'. (Dittmer 1987, 83).

The dominance of the colour red in the imagery of light provided a new context of interpretation for the old figure of speech *ben se* ('original colour', 'pure colour'). Traditionally, young Chinese had

been warned not to 'forget their original colour' (*wang ben*), meaning that they should not forget their ancestors and the values associated with them. Under Mao, however, the phrase was used repeatedly to warn young people from red-class families that they should not forget the revolutionary values appropriate to their *class* origin. The dominance of class and revolutionary values created a context of interpretation in which the figurative *ben se*, which had not referred literally to any part of the colour spectrum, now referred to an actual colour, red, and this in turn was a metaphor for something which was not a colour at all - revolutionary character.

The 'capitalist-roaders' whom Mao named as the principal targets of the Cultural Revolution were accused of plotting to make the Communist Party and China *bien yan se* ('change colour'). Within the context of interpretation which existed by the 1960s everyone knew that China's existing colour was red, and that this was a metaphor for the country's socialist character. Similarly, everyone knew that the colours to which China was in danger of changing were white and black - metaphors for the opposite pole of Chinese politics.

The evolving linguistic construction of 'white' and 'black' will repay further analysis. Before the communist takeover, 'white' (*bai*) was the antonym of 'black' (*hei*), symbolizing purity and goodness as opposed to darkness and evil. Under Mao, however, it gained a new meaning as the antonym of 'red'. In this context, it stood for the side of counterrevolution - for the Guomindang and for all who sought its return. Co-existence of the two meanings, the traditional one and the new political one, could sometimes trap the politically naïve. Zhai Zhenhua records an argument in which one student said 'You are black! I am white!' ('You are evil! I am good!') only to be crushed when her opponent shot back 'You are white! I am red!' ('You are anti-revolutionary! I am revolutionary!'). (Zhai 1992, 59-60).

From the outset of the Cultural Revolution, however, 'black' displaced 'white' as the antonym of 'red' in most contexts. There were good linguistic reasons for the change. The term 'white' had been applied mainly to openly declared class enemies like the Guomindang, but the Cultural Revolution was intended to expose and destroy a hidden menace - enemies who had secretly 'wormed their way into the

Party' and now threatened its 'red colour'. In this context 'black' was the perfect antonym for 'red', for it was an established metaphor representing evil which involved treachery or hidden designs and it had already been pressed into service against the Anti-Rightists in 1957. From the outset of the Cultural Revolution, the Central Cultural Revolution Group, the official press and the Red Guard newspapers referred to their targets as 'black gangs' (*heibang*), who conspired in 'black inns' (*heidien*), and who sought to draw a 'black veil' (*heimu*) over the 'black line' (*heixian*) which they secretly followed. These conspirators constituted an 'underground black party' (*dixia heidang*), which held 'black meetings' (*heihui*) in 'black headquarters' (*heisilingbu*). They spoke 'black words' (*heihua*), issued 'black instructions' (*heizhishi*), and they published 'black books' (*heishu*) and 'black documents' (*heiwenjian*) whose poisonous influence was a 'black wind' (*heifeng*). Though waving a 'red flag' (*hongqi*), they owed allegiance to a 'black flag' (*heiqi*), and from their 'black lairs' (*heiwou*) they manipulated 'black backstage supporters' (*heihoutai*). (All terms are taken from the Red Guard press in *RGP*, for example, vol. 5, pp. 1035, 1040, 1042, 1138, 1095, 1138, 1181; vol. 16, pp. 5001, 5006; vol. 17, pp. 5435, 5436, 5438, 5439; vol. 18, pp. 5441, 5855, 5857).

As Dittmer has pointed out, linked to the dichotomy of light and darkness was another crucial polarity: that between appearance and reality (Dittmer 1987, 83-90). The inhabitants of the World of Darkness were the class enemies, who appeared to be human beings when they masqueraded in the World of Light, but who in reality were demons, spirits and savage beasts. The official press, as usual, gave the revolutionary masses their cue:

> The enemy in daylight look like men, in darkness devils. To your face, they speak human language, behind your back, the language of devils. They are wolves clad in skins of sheep, man-eating smiling tigers.... The enemies without guns are more hidden, cunning, sinister and vicious than the enemies with guns. [*Liberation Army Daily*, 23 Aug. 1966, quoted Dittmer 1987, 83].

Such enemies disguised their deadly intent with 'sugar-coated bullets' (*tang yi paodan*). They were 'poisonous snakes' (*du she*) and 'poisonous lizards' (*du xiezi*) who had to be 'lured from their holes', 'foxes' (*huli*) who sought to go unrecognised by hiding their tails,

'jackals and wolves' (*chailang*) who emerged from their 'lairs' to savage unwary revolutionaries, 'parasitic worms' (*ji sheng chong*) and 'injurious vermin' (*hai ren chong*) silently sapping their victims' strength. Lesser enemies were 'small insects' (*xiao pa chong*), 'harmful insects' (*hairen chong*) and 'flies' (*cangying*), as well as the 'talons and fangs' (*zhaoya*) of people like Liu Shaoqi who stayed behind the scenes. All of these images were used to suggest deceit. Those who had no chance of hiding their villainy, such as members of the black categories or rival Red Guards, were often called 'dogs' (*gou*), creatures not known for deception. Rebel Red Guards called pro-Party opponents 'Loyalist dogs' (*baohuanggou*), and all types of Red guards said that their enemies had 'dogs' heads' (*goutou*), became 'mad dogs' (*kuang gou* or *feng gou*) when cornered and would end up as 'dead dogs' (*sigou*). Red-class Red Guards referred to children of the black categories as 'whelps' or 'sons of bitches' (*gou zaizi*). In all cases, the descriptions were intended to degrade and dehumanize those to whom they were applied. (All terms are taken from Red Guard tabloids, leaflets and posters in *RGP*, for example vol. 5, 1035, 1040, 1168; vol. 17, 5438, 5441, 5574; vol. 18, 5855, 5858; vol. 19, 6077).

These terms built on the animal imagery in Mao's own writings. One of his most famous sayings, of course, was 'All reactionaries are paper tigers.' But everyone who read the Little Red Book knew that Mao also said that these reactionaries had once been 'real tigers' which 'devoured people by the millions and tens of millions.' It was only after bitter struggle by the exploited that they became 'paper tigers, dead tigers, bean-curd tigers.' (*LRB*, 72-5). The tiger image was a recurrent one in Mao's writings, even in his poetry: 'Only the hero can drive tigers and leopards away' (Wang 1996). The tigers here were open enemies, but the Cultural Revolution was directed more at secret enemies - at those whom Mao called 'enemies without guns' (*LRB*, 16). So the symbol-makers now had to make the tigers smile and conjure up the images of the more traditionally deceitful inhabitants of Mao's revolutionary menagerie – creatures like snakes and insects. All types of snakes, Mao said, whether ones which showed their 'poisonous fangs' or ones which changed themselves into 'beautiful women', had 'felt the threat of the coming winter'. He warned, however, that they were 'far from frozen stiff.' (*Liberation Army Daily*, 22 July 1967, quoted in Wang 1996). The insects were just as capable of deceiving the unwary.

Flies could be devils in disguise and in Chinese tradition political enemies were denigrated as 'poisonous insects' which played magic tricks. Their weak point was that they showed their true natures when cursed, and it was Mao who gave to the Cultural Revolution its standard imprecation against insects: 'Sweep all harmful insects away!' (Wang 1996).

Although the Cultural Revolution was directed, on one level, against feudal tradition, on another level it utilized feudal superstitions to foment hatred of class enemies, identifying them with the whole pantheon of evil spirits mentioned in folklore and Buddhist mythology. The official press led the way, calling class enemies 'devils' (*muogui*), 'demons' (*guiguai*), 'vampires' (*xixie*), 'apparitions and spectres' (*wangliang guimei*), 'monsters' (*muoguai*) and Yama (*yanwang ye*) - the King of the Dead. To hide their identities they had 'painted skin' (*huapi*), they operated through others who were their 'devils' claws' (*muo zhao*), and they deceived their opponents with 'ghostly trickery' (*gui huazhao*), 'black magic' (*yaofeng*), and by speaking 'ghost language' (*guihua*) (Chuang 1967, 22-3). The most common description of class enemies, however, was *niugui sheshen*. Literally this means 'cow-ghosts and snake-gods', but it is usually translated freely as 'monsters and demons' or 'ghosts and monsters'. In Chinese mythology, *niugui sheshen* were evil spirits who took human shapes to perform evil tricks, but when unmasked reverted to their ghostly forms. The term *niugui sheshen* was popularized by Mao when he used it in a speech in 1957: 'All erroneous ideas, all poisonous weeds, all ghosts and monsters, must be subjected to criticism; in no circumstances should they be allowed to spread unchecked.' (Mao 1957b, 496). This theme was taken up during the Anti-Rightist Campaign, when intellectuals were described as *niugui sheshen* who had pretended to support the Party, only to be unmasked when they launched a barrage of criticism during the Hundred Flowers Campaign (Cheng 1986, 14). The term *niugui sheshen* epitomised the dichotomy between appearance (human form) and reality (demonic nature). It also pointed to the necessity of publicising what had been concealed: the demonic (anti-socialist) natures and activities of those whom the revolutionary masses were supposed to unmask. The slogan 'Expose all monsters and demons!' was a perfect tool for fostering the climate of paranoia and hatred which fuelled the Cultural Revolution.

Mao not only personally contributed *niugui sheshen* to the Chinese political vocabulary, but also *muogui* ('devils'). Indeed, he was responsible for the revival of demonic symbolism as a whole. No one would have dared to bring back feudal superstitions without his express permission, and he actively promoted their return. He took a special interest in this type of imagery and in fact edited a book called *The Story of Not Afraid of Devils.* Its purpose was to define the devilish nature of the people's enemies both in China and abroad, and to rally the people against those enemies (Wang 1996). So Mao was well equipped to turn China's feudal past to advantage during the Cultural Revolution.

As well as popularizing the imagery of ghosts, devils and animals with supernatural powers, Mao and his symbol-makers revived the art of curse sorcery (Wang 1996). It had been developed in ancient times when people believed that they were surrounded by mysterious and powerful supernatural forces which could not be controlled by natural means. It involved attacking the demons with curses which were verbal representations of a ferocious physical onslaught. The intention was to frighten the devils so badly that they revealed themselves, then wasted away from terror and eventually died. As creatures of the World of Darkness, they suffered from the light and heat, so curses like 'Deep fry the Devils!' were used frequently. That exact same curse was used during the Cultural Revolution, along with variants like 'Deep fry the Black Gangs!' or 'Set fire to the black city government!' Many of the curses were deliberately cruel. 'Smash the dog's head!' revolutionaries cried as they forced a hapless victim's head to the ground. *Red Flag* told those struggling against Wu Han to 'strip off his skin and cut his bones', while a Red Guard ballad warned Liu Shaoqi 'We will ferret you out, pull out your tendons, strip off your skin and kick your head like a ball.' (Quoted Wang 1996, 130). Many of the curses were in the spirit of a passage from Lu Xün endorsed by Mao, urging people to 'Beat the [mad] dog even when it has fallen into the water' and telling them 'Once you start beating it, beat it to death'. A popular curse was 'Foster the spirit of beating the dog which has fallen into the water! Hit the class enemies to the ground then trample them with tens of millions of feet!' Such curses, it was felt, would make the demons throw off their disguises and would drive them to their deaths. Both of these things

happened often enough to inspire faith in the cursing: many class enemies revealed their demonic natures by confessing to counterrevolutionary crimes, and still others foresaw a future with endless suffering and took their own lives.

Confidence in the curses depended, too, on confidence in the spirit which inspired them. In ancient times, people invoked the support of the gods. During the Cultural Revolution, however, their confidence in victory over the demons rested on their faith in Mao. Traditionally, people had used fire, water, brooms and mirrors - or words describing the action of these things - to make devils show their true shape, and during the Cultural Revolution they used similar language (Wang 1996). Metaphors of 'sweeping away' pervaded Mao's work (e.g. *LRB* 10-11, 119), and when revolutionaries swore to 'Sweep away all monsters and demons!' or to 'Sweep them into the rubbish bin of history!' they had the reassurance that they were using words uttered by Mao himself to express his invincible Thought. Similarly, when they brought demons to light with the 'flames of criticism' or washed away their disguises with a 'red torrent' of revolutionary activity, their inspiration was Mao's Thought. That Thought ('the sun') was a light powerful enough to reveal all the counterrevolutionary secrets of the world of darkness, it was the criterion or mirror against which everything could be scrutinized. As they themselves put it, 'Mao Zedong's thought is the mirror which can reveal demons' true natures' (*Mao Zedong si xiang shi zhao yiao jing*). Victory was certain.

People who used the language of the official press and called class enemies savage beasts, poisonous snakes or monsters and demons used words which stripped their opponents of all humanity. It reduced the class struggle to a battle between polar opposites - between antagonists who did not share even a common human nature. It was a language which implied that those who were its referents were class enemies by nature -- that they always had been anti-socialist and always would be. So when Liu Shaoqi, for example, was labelled a 'poisonous snake' and a 'renegade, traitor and scab' (*pantu, neijian gongzei*), his self-criticisms were dismissed as insincere and his personal history was re-written to prove that he had always secretly opposed the Party:

> Liu was born in sin and grew to manhood as a 'filial scion of the landlord class'; he 'wormed' his way into the Party at the time of its founding to 'speculate on revolution,' and he 'usurped every office he ever held.... Liu's essential guilt was immutable, its appearance opportunistic; his intention to do mischief was constant, his ability dependent on circumstances. [Dittmer 1974, 312 n.19].

So Liu, the loyal communist, was a class enemy by his very nature, condemned never again to be called 'comrade'. His fate, like that of other especially useful class enemies, was to be criticised time after time as a 'negative example' (Dittmer 1974, 313). If the people needed to be warned against something, then Liu was said to have advocated it. Even after he was left to die, his illnesses untreated, half naked in a cellar in the north of China, news of his death was suppressed and the newspapers continued to remind people of 'the towering crimes' of Liu Shaoqi. The immutability of his black nature, the impossibility of genuine repentance on his part, served the purposes of the symbol-masters who 'educated' the people by making him stand for everything they attacked during the Cultural Revolution.

Many Red Guards internalised the message of the language which they learned from the newspapers. They accepted the doctrine that revolutionaries and class enemies had different natures. They accepted that there was no middle road between the 'red' and the 'black', between socialism and revisionism, between revolution and counterrevolution, between the World of Light and the World of Darkness. As well as using language which implied these claims, they articulated them explicitly and sought to convert others to them. One Red Guard newspaper called upon its readers to 'Fire the moderates', then argued:

> [M]ildness (*wen*) is the biggest weak point of our Cultural Revolution movement and our most dangerous enemy at the moment ... Being mild is being <u>afraid</u>, it is being weak. It means that one <u>does not hate the enemy of the revolution</u>, that one is <u>inadequate in the struggle against the counterrevolutionary line</u>, and that one <u>does not have a clear political stand</u> when the critical moment comes. Being mild is being <u>slow</u> and <u>lacking political sharpness</u>. It is being <u>weak in one's sense of class struggle</u>. To be mild is to <u>lack initiative</u> and be <u>overcautious</u>. In short, mildness is a <u>Right deviation</u> and is <u>conservative</u> ... Mildness is a <u>manifestation of the bourgeois world outlook</u>, and it is

> the reflection of the vacillating and compromising nature of the petty bourgeoisie in our revolutionary ranks. Mildness is only the surface, the real nature is selfishness. The struggle against mildness is a struggle to fight selfishness and foster public spirit. Every revolutionary comrade must let the struggle touch his soul and resolutely seize power over the selfishness in his own mind. [*Xin Beida*, 14 march 1967. *RGP* vol. 5, p.1301, emphasis added].

This was an attempt to engineer semantic change. It operated on two levels. On the one hand, the passage sought to change the referents of the word *wen* ('mildness') through an argument which, given the assumptions of Mao's Thought, was perfectly rational. On the other hand, the passage also operated on a non-rational level, activating mechanisms of higher order conditioning by repeatedly associating the word *wen* with the negative terms underlined in the passage above. Most important, it said explicitly what the dichotomous language of the Cultural Revolution implied: that there was no middle road - that the whole conflict was between polar opposites of Good and Evil. In that case, there could be no negotiations, no compromise, no peace. Such a conflict could only be discussed in the language of war.

5.2 The Language of War

Military terms and metaphors, we saw in chapter 2, had always been prevalent in Mao's China, reflecting the fact that the Communist Party had won power through over two decades of warfare. They had been used in the rhetoric of class warfare, but often they were directed at foreign enemies or used to rally the Chinese people in the battle to increase production. During the Cultural Revolution, however, people spoke the language of war as never before, and it was directed overwhelmingly at human targets within China - the capitalist-roaders, revisionists, monsters and demons, and all the other victims of the Cultural Revolution. As always in matters of linguistic form, the lead came from the top. Mao himself had called on the revolutionary masses to 'Bombard the Headquarters' of the capitalist-roaders within the Party; Jiang Qing had opened the attack on Deng Tuo and Three Family Village with an article under the title 'Open Fire at the Black Anti-Party and Anti-socialist Line!' (*Liberation Army Daily*, 8 March 1966, quoted Chuang 1970, 19, emphasis added); and Lin Biao's

rhetoric rang with martial metaphors: '... literary criticism must reinforce its militancy, turn literary criticism into dagger and grenade' (*Lin Biao tongzhi weituo Jiang Qing tongzhi zhaokai de budui wenyi gongzuo zuotanhui jiyao. RGP*, vol. 16, p. 5003, emphasis added). This language reflected his view that 'Struggle is life - if you don't struggle against them, they will struggle against you.... if you don't kill them they will kill you.' (Quoted in Dittmer 1987, 117, emphasis added). The Maoist-controlled official press rammed home the message that the Cultural Revolution was a war:

> The struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in the area of the superstructure is like a battle between two armies - always one wins and one loses. Either we wipe them out or they eliminate us. We can't cease fire in ideological and cultural battle ... otherwise we surrender to bourgeois thought and culture. [*People's Daily*, 29 May 1967, reprinted in *RGP*, vol. 16, p. 5007, emphasis added].

The Red Guards were not slow to take their cue. Most-Rebel units adopted names which incorporated military terminology: '8.28 Fighting Squad', 'First Brigade of the First Army Division of the Red Guards of Number Four School', '8.29 Revolutionary Rebellion-Making General Headquarters', and so on. They labelled their tabloid newspapers *zhan bao* ('battle news') and they saw themselves as Mao's *xiao jiang* ('little generals') fighting a deadly war:

> 'Bombard the Headquarters' is like a bugle call directing mighty revolutionary contingents ... We'll follow your [Mao's] great strategic plan, galloping ahead with swords drawn, carrying all before us ... [*Xin Hui Bao*, 8 March 1968. *RGP*, vol. 5, p. 1146].

> To defend Mao and Mao's revolutionary line, we, Chairman Mao's most loyal Red Guards, dare to climb a mountain of swords or plunge into a sea of flames. We must ... hit them all at one attempt (*yi da er guang*). We must ignite a blazing prairie fire of the people's war, bury the entire the 'Liu Dynasty'! [*Xin Beida*, 12 April 1967. *RGP*, vol. 5 p. 1149].

> The 'Summary of the Forum' is an battle order from Chairman Mao's proletarian headquarters. It is a mobilization order calling for us to take up our pens and hold tight our guns to protect proletarian power. It betokens the coming of the red storm of the proletarian Cultural Revolution. [*Jie Fang Jun Bao*, 29 May 1967, *RGP* vol. 16, p. 5008].

> Aiming at the heads of the capitalist roaders, fiercely hack! Aiming at their throats, shoot! We must give them a deadly blow. [*Zhi Nong Hong Qi*, no. 7, Jan. 1968, *RGP* vol. 3].
>
> We want gunpowder and the smoke of gunpowder, and we don't want rosy colour! We want violence! We want to seize power! We are against reconciliation and compromise. Down with eclecticism!" [*Zhan Di Wen Yi*, no. 8, *RGP* vol. 2].
>
> The cultural front should fight its way out! Fight! Fight! Fight! Fight until the enemy is utterly routed. Fight till the end and never return! Fight until a new and bright red cultural field of Mao Zedong Thought comes! [*Hong Yi Zhan Bao*, 15 March 1967. *RGP* vol. 7, p. 1828].
>
> The Capital Red Flag Red Guard is born in the gunfire and smoke of gunpowder of the life-and-death battle between the two lines. [*Shoudu Hongqi Chiweijun Xuanyan*, 21 January 1967. *RGP* vol. 19, p. 6084].
>
> The Cultural Revolution, like a thundering storm, is sweeping away one by one the bourgeoisie's obstinate blockhouses. [*Fan Xiu Bao & Geming Zaofan Jun Bao*, 23 May 1967, *RGP* vol. 4].

These extracts and others like them are packed with terms which will be taken, in default of contextual evidence to the contrary, to have military referents: headquarters (*silingbu*), contingents (*xiaofendui*), swords (*jian*), war (*zhanzheng*), foe (*diren*), battle order (*zhandou hao ling*), battle front (*zhanxian*), weapon (*wuqi*), guns (*qiang*), gunpowder (*zhayao*), gunfire (*paohuo*), bombard (*paohong*), encirclement (*baowei*), mobilization (*dongyuan*), blockhouse (*diaobao*), fortress (*baolei*). Nearly all these words are nouns invented to describe specifically military organization, technology or tactics as they have developed over the years. They are used as martial metaphors for non-military things, but that is a secondary function.

The description of war requires many other terms whose *prima facie* reference is less definite, but which have military referents in the context of the passages in which they occur. The Red Guard newspapers are packed with such terms, and they are nearly all verbs: *zhansheng* ('vanquish'), *xiji* ('strike'), *maizang* ('bury'), *fensui* ('shatter'), *pi* ('hack'),*kan* ('hack'), *paoji* ('batter'), *daji* ('hit'), *bodou* ('fight'), *qianmie* ('annihilate', 'wipe out'), *xiaomie* ('exterminate', 'liquidate'), *qingchu* ('liquidate'), *jikui* ('rout'), *dabai* ('defeat'), *saochu*

('sweep away'), *fensui* ('crush'), *zhuiji* ('pursue'), *duoqu* ('seize'), *wuzhuang* ('arm'), *cuihui* ('destroy'), *shengli* ('victory'), *zhanlue bushu* ('strategic plan'), *hanwei* ('defend'), *baowei* ('defend', 'guard'), *baohu* ('protect'). These words are equally applicable to many types of aggression, for specifically military forms of attack require hardly any specialized verbs. The words are positive from the point of view of the aggressor, so they are mostly used with reference to the actions of 'revolutionary' forces. If they are used to describe the actions of 'reactionaries', they are almost invariably qualified by words such as 'attempt to ...' or 'seek vainly to ...'. Finally, very few of the verbs have defensive meanings - *hanwei* ('defend'), *baowei* ('defend', 'guard') and *baohu* ('protect ') being the only common exceptions. Both Chinese and English have more verbs for attack than for defence, but the disparity is not nearly as great as in the Red Guard newspapers, which had the positive and aggressive outlook of revolutionaries seeking to conquer the World for Mao's Thought.

A further characteristic of the language of war is that it includes many metaphors based on descriptions of the forces of nature. 'Red storm', 'thundering storm' and 'blazing prairie fire' are stock metaphors linked to the actions of the revolutionary masses in the passages above. Other metaphors include 'the fury of a hurricane', 'the power of thunder and lightning', 'a mighty red torrent', 'surging waves', 'blazing flames', and 'the momentum of an avalanche and the force of a thunderbolt'. Most of these metaphors originated in Mao's own writings, and many were reproduced in the Little Red Book (Mao 1927, 21-2; 1930, 118-21; LRB, 119). Their purpose was to suggest the invincible power of the forces of revolution. They were far more imposing than equivalent metaphors used to describe the activities of class enemies - metaphors characterised by less striking nouns and negative adjectives. 'Black wind', 'black cloud', 'black mist' and 'adverse current' were typical metaphors for anti-revolutionary activity.

Finally, in the language of war the conflict was not between humans sharing a common human nature. It was between revolutionary soldiers (human but ultimately invincible) and class enemies whose nature was that of savage animals and demons from the world of darkness:

> The handful of diehard capitalist-roaders become more and more isolated, but they will not resign themselves to defeat. They pounce again and again on the revolutionary masses, and launch desperate counter-attacks on Mao's revolutionary line and on the proletarian revolutionary headquarters - the Central Cultural Revolution Group - with ten times more frenzy and a hundred times more hatred. They make threatening gestures with their bare fangs and claws, vainly attempting to swallow all the revolutionaries, fully revealing their wolves' natures! [*Shoudu Hongqi Chiweijun Xuanyan*, 21 January 1967. *RGP*, vol. 19, p. 6084, emphasis added).

In the language of war, the conflict was between groups so fundamentally different that no compromise, no armistice, no peace was possible. It was a war to the death between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. In such a war, any cruelty was possible.

5.3 Language and Violence

No one knows how many people died as a result of the Cultural Revolution. J.K. Fairbank cites an estimate of 400,000 (Fairbank 1988, 320); another scholar, who has a reputation for caution, puts deaths at one million (Shalom 1984, cited White 1989, 7); and some estimates are far higher (e.g. Liu 1986, 48, 56 n.16). Whatever the true figure, it represents only a fraction of the violence of the Cultural Revolution. Beatings, torture and the denial of medical treatment to sick and injured enemies were systematic and widespread. Wang (1995) interviewed hundreds of people from 76 schools and discovered not a single school in which no teachers were beaten. Outside the schools, universities and intellectual circles, the main victims were people of 'bad class' background, who were traumatized by the 'Red Terror' during the campaign against the Four Olds and who were persecuted periodically thereafter; and the cadres, of whom 60-80 percent were purged (Dittmer 1987, 96), often with accompanying violence. And, of course, many died or suffered cruel beatings as opposing factions of Red Guards and rival factions of workers fought in bitter struggles for power, using fists, clubs, stones and eventually guns as China descended into low-level civil war.

Scholars have explored the political, institutional and social roots of the violence (Solomon 1971; Liu 1976; Lee 1978; Chan, Rosen & Unger 1980; Rosen 1982; Chan 1985; Thurston 1988; White 1989; Wang 1995; Gong 1996). Their analyses, and the argument of chapters 2-4 above, suggest several explanations of the violence which are not specifically linguistic. First, Mao had organized China around the conflict of artificially created 'classes' or 'categories'. He created inequalities between these classes and pitted them against each other in competitive purging, encouraging people to avoid suspicion by acts of revolutionary extremism and exaggerated Mao-worship. This created rivalry and class hatred which the Party manipulated to Mao's advantage until July 1966. When he then removed the Party's control and gave the 'revolutionary masses' their head, the artificially created hatreds exploded, with the initial victims being the groups principally targeted in previous campaigns - the intellectuals, the bourgeoisie and members of the black categories. Indeed, these were precisely the groups which the Party's work teams had victimised while they were still in charge of the Cultural Revolution. If violence erupted easily, it was because people had been taught to hate anyone who was called a class enemy, and because there were official precedents for violence.

Second, the system of tight Party control which existed until 1966 created bitter resentment against many cadres. In particular, cadres who headed work units (*danwei*) had such powers to give or deny permission, to dispense or deny patronage, to mobilize criticism and to force self-criticism that even the best of them made enemies. We have seen how Mao placed the cadres in a false position by switching the context of interpretation so that those who had implemented Party policies suddenly became 'anti-socialist' opponents of the Cultural Revolution. As a result, when he called upon people to criticise the Party, those who had grievances against particular cadres or against the whole system of Party control were able to take a savage revenge.

Third, while the Central Cultural Revolution Group and Mao himself sought to prevent the violence from getting out of hand, they encouraged it when it contributed to revolutionary fervour or to the defeat of a faction which they opposed. Two policy statements were crucial. In late August 1966 the Minister of Public Security, Xie Fuzhi, gave the Red Guards a free hand to do what they liked with members of

the black categories: 'Should the Red Guards who kill others be punished? My view is that if people are killed, then they are killed; it's no business of ours.... I do not approve [the] masses killing people, but if the masses hate bad people so much that we cannot stop them, then let us not insist on [stopping them]... The people's police should stand on the side of the Red Guards....' (Quoted Yan & Gao 1996, 76). Then in 1967 the Central Cultural Revolution Group told the army to 'arm the Rebels for self-defence'. When different army units adopted their own interpretations of who the 'Rebels' were, both sides ended up acquiring arms and the bloodshed escalated. In this context of qualified approval from the top, violence became a revolutionary act, and excesses of violence became a mark of superior revolutionary virtue. Mao himself never unambiguously promoted violence in his public statements and he called for peace when it suited him; but he praised the Red Guards after some of their most bloody excesses, and when violence helped his cause it did not concern him in the least. Indeed, as China descended into turmoil, he summed up his indifference by saying, 'It is not a bad thing to let the young have some practice in using arms - we haven't had a war for so long.' (Chang 1992, 471).

Fourth, with the breakdown of established authority, an anarchic situation emerged in which Red Guards, workers and cadres who did not use violence could not compete in the battle for survival with those who did. Successful use of force to gain power in one's own city or province was the key to personal safety. Those who succeeded were able to control the process of reference assignment and label their opponents as 'counterrevolutionaries'; those who failed were suppressed, humiliated, beaten and sometimes killed. The rationally self-interested pursuit of violent strategies of survival by people belonging to different factions created a situation in which no one was safe. So individual rationality produced collective insanity and China descended into civil war until Mao unequivocally called for an end to the violence and used the Army to restore order.

What has not been systematically investigated is the role of language in promoting violence. The hate-filled character of the language has been readily acknowledged, but most writers have seen this as a reflection of the social and institutional tensions which

produced the violence. They have implicitly and sometimes explicitly discounted the view that language had any independent role in generating those tensions. Lynn T. White, for example, notes briefly the dichotomous and warlike character of the linguistic symbols which we have discussed, then suggests:

> People chose these symbols to express the intensity of their frustration at having been manipulated by government categories, bosses, and threats. They were mad. Pastels would not do; so they chose red. Quiet sutras and relaxed muscles could not let out enough of their anger, after their lives had been exploited so egregiously for years; thus they shouted loud slogans and clenched their fists, instead. A formal consistency of many symbols in the Cultural Revolution is evident. This pattern came not because uniformity is natural, or because such things are random, but because of the need for a language to express intense motives among people who felt sharp pain at specifiable kinds of state coercion.
>
> These symbols were just options. Different, quietistic emblems have been sometimes chosen by Chinese people. Symbols do not cause events. Their selection is a thing to be explained ... not an explainer. Their availability tells us nothing, because their opposites were also available. [White 1989, 270-1].

This passage occurs near the beginning of a chapter called 'Conflict among Local Symbol Makers, 1966-68' - a chapter which says only a little more about symbols but a great deal about the conflicts which led people to 'choose' them. In the remainder of this chapter I will argue for a more positive view of the role of language in promoting violence. It is an argument which is compatible with what we might term a 'weak Whorfian' position in which language is seen as one *influence* on thought and through thought on action. It is also an argument which suggests that a 'strong Whorfian' position, in which language is seen as the *determinant* of thought, is untenable.

White's account of linguistic symbols depends upon his view that the Chinese people 'chose' the symbols which they used when denouncing their opponents. This is a simple historical error. As we have seen in chapters 2 and 4 and in the earlier sections of this chapter, the last thing which the Chinese people were free to choose was their linguistic symbols. Speaking the official language of Mao-worship and class warfare was something which everyone had to do simply to survive. Until August 1966, that language was dictated to

them from above by the Party and by the official press; after August 1966, when the Party was made to bow to mass criticism, the symbols were promulgated by the official press alone, now in the hands of the Maoists. These symbols were used even by people who hated what they stood for. So the people did not 'choose' red as the colour of class war and revolution, but had it dictated to them by the Party long before the Cultural Revolution; they did not 'choose' the hate-filled and empowering linguistic formulae which we discussed in chapter 4, but learned them from the official news media, school teachers and study groups; and they did not 'choose' the linguistic dichotomies, the animal and demon imagery or the language of class warfare, for this was all given to them by the official press. Everyone spoke the same language because it was Mao's language, because using it showed a revolutionary spirit, and because a refusal to use it was a suicidal, counterrevolutionary act.

Mao and his supporters policed the linguistic symbols so rigorously because they knew that they were not mere reflections of people's needs, passions and desires, but independent influences on thought. We saw in chapter 1 that control of language influences thought partly through what Petty and Cacioppo (1986, 9) call 'rather primitive affective and associational processes'. These processes are especially powerful when people are exposed repeatedly to persuasive scripts and when they lack alternative sources of information. Every one of the processes discussed in chapter 1 operated through the scripts copied from the official press by revolutionaries who needed to know the correct terms of abuse for the class enemy. When people whom others admired said repeatedly that Liu Shaoqi was a 'spy, traitor and scab', for instance, this tended to persuade by producing a strong modelling effect amongst the admirers. When members of a student group said that the biology teacher was a 'monster and demon', this produced a reference group effect which tended to sway the views of those who sought the group's acceptance. When an accused person's name or face was repeatedly juxtaposed with words like 'revisionist', 'vermin', 'vampire' and 'devil', then higher order conditioning transferred the negative connotations associated with those words to the accused, especially when the general public had little or no personal knowledge of the accused to offset the effect. And when people were rewarded by group acceptance for cursing a class enemy,

operant conditioning made them more inclined to accept the propositional content of the curse.

One of the most interesting and important sources of attitude change was the cognitive dissonance which the language of condemnation produced in those who thought of themselves as good and kind people, and who often *were* good and kind. Caught up in the passion of the Cultural Revolution, seeking to demonstrate their fervour, they condemned their victims using the only legitimate words - the terms of abuse laid down in the official press. The consequences of labelling someone with those words, however, were devastating: they were words which inspired fear and ruined lives. Callous people experienced no dissonance when they cursed their victims - no psychological discomfort caused by a discrepancy between a humane self-image and cruel behaviour. Those who experienced dissonance were people who were ordinarily kind and who wanted to think of themselves as kind. Few of these people had ever done anything half so harmful to others as when they cursed their victims in language which stripped them of their dignity, denied their humanity and labelled them class enemies. The easiest way they could justify this terrible act was to believe that those whom they condemned really *were* class enemies, that they had all the vile characteristics attributed to them by the curses, and that they therefore *deserved* their fate. When kind people voluntarily directed the official language of condemnation against another human being, dissonance shifted their attitudes in the direction of the language. They began to hate their victims.

The effects of language on thought can be illustrated from the shift in attitudes recorded in the honest and reflective autobiography of Zhai Zhenhua, a red-class Red Guard in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution (Zhai 1992). A modest girl whose best friend came from a non-red background, she was well liked and respected. When she became a Red Guard she promised 'to make more friends and to unite all students.' But once she became a revolutionary leader she was subjected to new pressures and new linguistic influences. The Red Guards at this time were all of red-class origin, and the arrogant and class-conscious spirits among them invented a *duilian* or three line stanza which asserted the red categories' hereditary revolutionary heroism and the black categories' hereditary baseness. Taking

inspiration from the *duilian*, they composed a song which became the Red Guard anthem. It began like this:

> The old man a true man, the son is a hero,
> The old man a reactionary, the son is an asshole.
> If you are revolutionary, then step forward and come along,
> If you are not, damn you to hell.

And it ended like this:

> Damn you to hell!
> Depose you from your fucking post!
> Kill! Kill! Kill!

All the Red Guards in Zhai's school learned it, and she did too. At first she sang it softly, embarrassed by the crude words, but soon she was singing it confidently with other Red Guards while 'marching on the streets, riding in trucks, and at every available opportunity.' Every time she sang, she associated students from bad class backgrounds with the words 'reactionary', 'asshole', 'damn', 'hell', 'fucking' and 'kill'. Every time she sang, she saw that members of her reference group seemed happy to denigrate the black categories. Every time she sang, she experienced positive reinforcement from a 'high' as she participated in identity-building self-entertainment in the company of her reference group. So higher order conditioning, reference group effects and operant conditioning were all at work. Within a couple of weeks, she recalls, the *duilian* 'had already begun to take root in me. My sympathy towards students from non-revolutionary families was rapidly disappearing.' Soon she was intimidating and abusing students from the black categories, menacing them with her belt as they sat with their heads bowed before her:

> This is called the "proletarian dictatorship!" It is the opposite of the "capitalist dictatorship" your parents imposed on the working people before Liberation.... Let's imagine how it would have been if we were still in the evil old society. How would you have treated us? ... You would ride roughshod over us, starve us, and make us child labourers!

'My imagination carried me away and aroused a strong indignation in me', she recalls in her autobiography. 'I liked that because I really wanted to prove that our actions were justified.' Her need to persuade herself that her actions were 'justified' stemmed from the dissonance

caused by her hate-filled words and her menacing demeanour, and that is why she 'liked' the 'strong indignation' which she felt as her imagination brought her ideas into line with what she had said. As she continued her harangue, her language became even more extreme, her face contorted, she swung her belt ferociously towards her audience, and she began to make herself distraught. This produced more dissonance, which was resolved by an even more extreme attitude shift. 'Oh, how I hated my classmates at that moment', she said, 'only because of my own flights of fancy.' In the short space of a month, a popular and mild-mannered student had become the 'fierce enemy' of her bad-class fellow students, 'vilifying them and trampling their dignity.' She was now ready to start proving her political consciousness and valour by beating people from the black categories, and once again the need to remove dissonance produced an attitude shift:

> In the beginning I dared not look at the person under my feet. I had to stiffen myself mentally to continue. I kept thinking, "These are class enemies, bad people.... They're only getting what they deserve. I shouldn't feel sorry for them. In class struggle, either you die or I do." ... After a few beatings, I no longer needed to rehearse the rationale behind them. My heart hardened and I became used to the blood ... The Cultural Revolution had transformed me into a devil. (Zhai 1992, 79-82, 96-7, 105-6).

Zhai was just one of countless idealistic and kind young people who were transformed into 'devils' by the Cultural Revolution. And a crucial element in that transformation was the language promoted by the symbol-makers - a language which 'took root' in their hearts through the 'primitive affective and associational processes' which we have explained.

The most violent language of denunciation was intended to inform its victims and all who heard it that the accused were class enemies, that they were evil by nature, that they had to be ostracised and that they deserved the most severe punishments. Like all attempts at communication, it came with the speakers' guarantee of relevance, so that the assumptions which it conveyed were put forward as true. People who loved the victims or knew them well sometimes rejected the assumptions as irrelevant because they contradicted existing assumptions which seemed more likely to be true. However, most who

heard the condemnations had no personal knowledge of the accused, and such people were unlikely to possess opposing assumptions so deeply entrenched that the message could not attain relevance. For example, if the official press, the Central Cultural Revolution Group and all those who spoke for Mao said that Liu Shaoqi was a 'capitalist roader', a 'revisionist', 'a spy, traitor and scab' with the nature of a 'poisonous snake', *they* were the people who were in a position to know. Their message came with a guarantee of relevance, their authority enhanced that relevance, and politically naïve young people often accepted the message as true. Similarly, if Red Guards backed by Mao used information supplied by the police to accuse countless members of the black categories of being 'monsters and demons', this strongly reinforced the existing assumptions of most members of non-black classes. In their eyes, it was therefore highly relevant and widely accepted as true. I myself remember how, as a young girl, I heard the standard language of abuse levelled at people whom I did not know. My reaction was always 'They must have done something. Why else would people say these things?' Faith in the guarantee of relevance which makes people attend to communicative utterances was a powerful aid to persuasion during the Cultural Revolution.

The invective of the Cultural Revolution not only produced attitude shifts in those who used it, but it had a shocking impact on those at whom it was directed. Indeed, use of such language was itself a form of violence: it degraded its victims, dehumanised them, threatened them and terrified them, just as it was intended to do. It was not only the imagery of the language which terrified, but its substantive message: those who were cursed in the strongest terms were thereby labelled as class enemies. They would become outcasts with no rights, no future, no friends; their families would be persecuted and pressured to disown them; 'the people' would 'struggle militantly' against them (*wu dou*), a process which involved physical coercion; and finally, they knew that class enemies were thought worthy of death and that large numbers had in fact been killed in the early 1950s. They knew that if they themselves were not killed, they would still be treated as enemies with the natures of snakes, vermin, flies, jackals, vampires, monsters and demons. They knew that no matter how many times they confessed their crimes and swore allegiance to Mao, no one would believe in their sincerity because

deceit was their special skill. They had been labelled, and the label had set their fate. Many concluded that they were better off dead. At Nankai University, where I lived, about a dozen professors and highly placed academic administrators committed suicide. In every memoir of the Cultural Revolution, the authors mention people who killed themselves after being labelled. No one who lived through those times is puzzled about why they did it.

When the language of denunciation inflicted such torture on its victims, resort to physical violence was not a big step. It was just the natural concomitant of the language with which they had been condemned. When revolutionaries beat, kicked, tortured and even killed their victims, they were simply carrying out their proclaimed intention to 'strike down', 'crush', 'trample' and 'exterminate' class enemies. They took the language of their curses fairly literally. This is not surprising, for one context of interpretation which was readily available to them consisted of assumptions detailing the systematic and state-sanctioned violence meted out to class enemies since 1949. Once the Maoist media had made the language of war against the class enemy the official language of the Cultural Revolution, it was inevitable that many people would interpret that language in the context of assumptions detailing the previous treatment of class enemies. If they did that, they could only interpret the curses as a call to violence.

If it was easy and natural for many people to interpret the official language of condemnation as a call to violence, other interpretations were available to people who were not anxious to heed that call. In particular, the language could be defused by ignoring contextual assumptions detailing the previous treatment of class enemies, selecting instead assumptions like the following:

1. The Sixteen Points say, 'When there is a debate, it should be conducted by reasoning, not by coercion or force.' (*CCP Documents*, 46-9).

2. Mao himself says, 'Conduct civil struggle and refrain from physical violence.'

These assumptions led a lot of people to defuse the official language of condemnation, interpreting it figuratively as an attempt to arouse enthusiasm for a campaign based on non-violent criticism and self-criticism. In any debate with the militants, however, they were handicapped, for Mao could be quoted on both sides, and defending those who had been labelled class enemies was dangerous. Consider Jung Chang's account of her attempt to stop Chian, an army officer's son, from administering a merciless beating:

> Now I murmured, trying to control the quaking in my voice, 'Didn't Chairman Mao teach us to use verbal struggle [*wen-dou*] rather than violent struggle [*wu-dou*]? Maybe we shouldn't ...?'
>
> My feeble protest was echoed by several voices in the room. But Chian cast us a disgusted sideways glance and said emphatically: 'Draw the line between yourselves and the class enemy. Chairman Mao says, "Mercy to the enemy is cruelty to the people!"' If you are afraid of blood, don't be Red Guards!' His face was twisted into ugliness by fanaticism. The rest of us fell silent ... we could not argue with him. We had been taught to be ruthless to class enemies. Failure to do so would make us class enemies ourselves. I turned and walked quickly into the garden at the back. (Chang 1992, 407-8).

Why did some people choose contexts of interpretation which led to the intended fairly literal interpretation of the language of denunciation, whereas others chose contexts which enabled them to interpret it figuratively? One obvious reason, of course, is that some individuals had a consistent predisposition to humanity and others a predisposition to brutality, and they chose contexts of interpretation which justified a reading of the curses which suited their respective inclinations. Indeed, the memoirs of revolutionary activists and their victims contain a lot of evidence both that some people were deeply unhappy with the violence and that others found in the Cultural Revolution a perfect opportunity to indulge in sadistic or criminal acts which were normally suppressed (Chang 1992, 407-8, 411-12, 436-7, 479-80; Ling 1972, 250-1, 309, 324-6, 333-4). More common than simple sadism was the extremism generated by a competitive system in which people were pressed to surpass each other in displays of revolutionary enthusiasm. Those who were determined to prove themselves the most committed revolutionaries could succeed only if they chose interpretive assumptions which legitimized violence. Similarly, those who had a special hatred of the groups under attack

were more motivated to choose assumptions which yielded a literal interpretation of the curses, for they could then claim official justification for assault and murder. Chian, the army officer's son whose violence sickened Jung Chang, probably fell into both these categories. By contrast, people who were less revolutionary, who were less ambitious, or who did not hate the groups under attack were no doubt more inclined to select assumptions which turned the most savage curses into innocuous figures of speech. Finally, some people were simply opportunistic: when threatened, they preferred assumptions which defused the violent language, but when on the attack they chose assumptions which gave the language its full, literal force and justified the vilest acts.

It is clear, then, that we cannot explain the violent attitudes and actions of the Cultural Revolution as a simple product of the violent language given to them from on high. That language could be read as an incitement to actual physical violence only with the aid of contextual assumptions which some people selected and others ignored. Those assumptions must count as co-determinants of the contrasting meanings which people gave to the language. This constitutes a compelling objection to full linguistic determinism, which has to place exclusive emphasis on language as the determinant of meaning and hence of thought. Such a stance ignores the fact that the referents of semantic categories vary according to the context of interpretation - a context of interpretation which is not *given*, but *chosen* by everyone who undertakes the process of reference assignment (cf. Sperber & Wilson 1995, 132-151). In choosing the appropriate context, we select the assumptions most consistent with the principle of relevance - and this very often means assumptions which are accessible because they suit our preconceptions, interests and prejudices. So the 'patterning' of our thoughts by semantic categories is always incomplete, mediated as it is by contextual factors which often vary from person to person as a result of different experiences, different interests and different biases. As a result, during the Cultural Revolution everybody used language which was semantically violent, but in many people this did not produce violent attitudes because they disarmed the language with interpretive assumptions which reduced it to a harmless metaphor. So uniformity of language did not produce uniformity of thought. That,

from a linguistic point of view, is one significant lesson of the Cultural Revolution.

A second lesson of the discourse of violence during the Cultural Revolution is that a 'weak Whorfian' position - that the language we use *influences* our thought - is thoroughly sustainable. In the first place, many people *did* interpret the violent language as a call for actual physical violence. They did this because they chose particular contextual assumptions. However, because those contextual assumptions led them to take the language literally, and because they had no strong moral assumptions which made them resistant to its message, their thought reproduced the violence of the semantic categories. In the absence of significantly obstructive moral assumptions, language and interpretive context *together* were able to 'pattern' thought along the lines of the semantic categories.

This translation of semantic categories into patterns of thought operated through the rational, if largely unconscious, mechanisms of language processing. 'Patterning' by this rational route affected only those who interpreted the semantic categories literally, making them refer to actual physical violence. We have seen, however, that 'primitive affective and associational processes', not at all rational, also affected people's attitudes. These processes influenced not only the attitudes of people who understood the violent curses literally, but also the attitudes of many who saw the curses as metaphors for enthusiastic but non-violent criticism. Mechanisms of higher order conditioning, operant conditioning, modelling, reference group identification and cognitive dissonance tended to increase hostility to the accused, even amongst people who interpreted the violent language metaphorically. Strong personal loyalties to the accused sometimes frustrated these mechanisms, but even here they could have an effect. When parents were accused, for example, their own children sometimes came eventually to doubt them, demanding that they confess their crimes.

Mao and his fellow symbol-makers in the Central Cultural Revolution Group knew that language was a potent tool of persuasion and control. Indeed, when they incited the masses against the Party, destroying the established mechanisms of coercion, they gambled on their ability to direct the Cultural Revolution by issuing instructions

and manipulating linguistic symbols through the official press. At first, their faith in the power of language to communicate and persuade paid off. With great success, they mobilized the masses to attack the school teachers and intellectuals, to destroy the Four Olds, to dethrone the Party, and to mount a witch-hunt for class enemies which promoted unprecedented displays of devotion to Mao and his Thought. They also invented a language of condemnation, based on the ancient practice of curse sorcery, which fostered sometimes hysterical hatred of class enemies and led many to torture them, beat them mercilessly and even kill them. Eventually, however, the limitations of an attempt to manipulate the population through controlling language became apparent. Loyalty and fear could make everyone use the same language, but nothing could ensure that the masses who were 'mobilizing freely' shared a common context of interpretation. People gave the same words different referents: one person's 'revolutionary' was another person's 'counter-revolutionary', and one person's call to physical violence was another person's call to strong but reasoned criticism. Language influenced people's attitudes, but semantic uniformity did not translate into uniformity of thought or action. The Cultural Revolution therefore descended into chaos.

III

THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION 1968-76: CENTRALIZING CONTROL OF LANGUAGE AND INTERPRETATION

CHAPTER 6

INSTITUTIONALIZING THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION: CREATING REFERENTS, CONTROLLING THE WORD, POLICING INTERPRETATION

6.1 Re-building the Institutions of Centralized Control

Chairman Mao's 'free mobilization' of the revolutionary masses had been intended to teach the Party a terrible lesson and to enforce conformity to his Thought. He had never had any intention of liberating the masses more than briefly from hierarchical control, or of instituting the people's democracy on the model of the Paris Commune which he had promised in the 'Sixteen Points'. Once the rebel Red Guards and revolutionary workers had overwhelmed the Party, Mao quickly sought to reassert control through the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and through Revolutionary Committees which were usually dominated by the PLA but included rehabilitated cadres and representatives of the revolutionary masses. Many Red Guards and some workers, however, resisted the new hierarchy, and anarchy continued in many parts of China. Finally, in July 1968 Mao personally and unequivocally ordered an end to all violence and subdued the dissidents using Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Teams consisting of workers or PLA members who had not been involved in the fighting, as well as regular PLA units and a specially created Central Support the Left force. Disorder still erupted periodically in some regions, but the country as a whole was progressively brought under centralized control (Liu 1976, 173-183; Lee 1978, 276-87).

The new hierarchy effectively neutralised one source of disorder by expelling most of the former Red Guards to the countryside. There they were to work as agricultural labourers, reforming their thoughts under the supervision of the poor and lower-middle peasants. Nearly all former Red Guards of middle or bad class origin - the backbone of the Rebels who had led the attack on the Party - suffered this fate. Those who escaped were almost entirely of red class origin - workers' children assigned to factories, or revolutionary cadres' children who

joined the PLA (Unger 1982, 134-5). One way or the other, all the former Red Guards lost their freedom of action and all were subordinated directly to hierarchical structures whose ultimate authority was Chairman Mao.

The Chinese people were placed under a system of 'centralised segregation' like that which had operated before the Cultural Revolution. 'Cross-trade alliances' between students and workers were banned and all independent organization was strictly forbidden. Unauthorised travel was prohibited and people lived out their lives under the care and control of their work units and neighbourhood committees. In the cities, the whole process was supervised by the PLA, with military men filling most of the crucial positions. After the death and disgrace of Lin Biao in 1971, however, the army became less influential, and rehabilitated or newly recruited cadres progressively regained their power. By then, the Revolutionary Committees had long become moribund, with reconstituted Party Committees resuming their former role after 1969. So the old structures of authority had reasserted themselves as the enforcers of Chairman Mao's new revolutionary order (Liu 1976, 176-83; Kahn-Ackermann 1982, 77; Liu 1986, 149-50; Dittmer & Chen 1981, 31; Dittmer 1987, 175-83; Lieberthal 1995, 117-8).

Consolidation of the new order was promoted by a massive campaign to Purify the Class Ranks which lasted from 1967 to 1969, conducted by special teams under the control of the Revolutionary Committees, Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Teams and the PLA. The campaign was intended to root out cadres who were unreformed bourgeois power holders, renegades and spies, or who were members of the five black categories. The masses were called upon to expose and condemn these targets, and as before were particularly hard on cadres who had earned their enmity by rigorously carrying out Party policy before the Cultural Revolution. However, popular anger was now tightly controlled, and upper level leaders ultimately decided the fate of the accused (Lee 1978, 287-96). As the campaign developed momentum, it ruined the lives of millions of people, including many who were not cadres. Members of the black categories were hauled out for yet another round of persecution, and the hunt for spies and renegades caused countless false accusations and terrible punishments.

The death toll reached at least the tens of thousands (Yan & Gao 1996; Chang 1992, 496).

The Campaign to Purify the Class Ranks was only the most far-reaching and savage of a succession of campaigns through which the Maoist leadership mobilized the masses against alleged class enemies, against leading comrades who had committed serious mistakes, or against 'revisionist' beliefs like the doctrine of 'bourgeois rights'. Such campaigns included the One Strike and Three Antis Movement, the Anti-Lin Biao Campaign, the Campaign to Criticise Lin Biao and Confucius, the Campaign to Study the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, the Campaign to Criticise the Water Margin and the Campaign to Criticise Deng Xiaoping. All these campaigns were seen, officially, as a continuation of the Cultural Revolution, institutionalizing its processes of criticism, self-criticism and class conflict. The difference now was that the revolution was conducted in accordance with instructions issued by the Party Centre. The era of 'free mobilization' of the masses was over.

6.2 Creating Referents: The 'New Born Things' and the Context of Interpretation

The institutional phase of the Cultural Revolution was intended to construct a society consistent with the revolution's rhetoric – or at least with the ruling Maoists' interpretation of that rhetoric. That society featured none of the Paris Commune-style democracy which the Rebels had thought the rhetoric portended. Instead, its most striking features were the 'New Born Things of the Cultural Revolution'. These, it was now officially determined, were the referents of Mao's demand that the revolutionaries, having 'destroyed the old', should also 'create the new'.

The 'New Born Things' were the official fulfilment of the 'anti-power holder' rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution. They were the cornerstones of a new social order designed to prevent the emergence of a new bureaucratic and Party élite. Their purpose, however, was not to substitute 'rule by the people' for 'rule by the power-holders', as the Rebel Red Guards had hoped. It was to prevent the emergence of any

group powerful enough to frustrate the wishes of the greatest power-holder of all - Mao Zedong himself. The New Born Things included:

(a) *Workers' Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Teams.* These were Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Teams consisting of workers, rather than members of the PLA. Early in the institutional phase of the Cultural Revolution, they were placed in charge of schools, universities, theatres and the entire realm of literature and culture. Their task was not only to restore order and to ensure that teaching, writing, painting and the performing arts conformed to Mao's Thought. It was also to put the 'experts' in their place, to subordinate them to red-class supervisors with no relevant skills. Mao thereby hoped to prevent the re-emergence of a revisionist élite whose claims sometimes rested on criteria independent of his Thought. In the ideology of the Cultural Revolution, this élite had conspired with Liu Shaoqi to pursue a 'seventeen year Black Line' between 1949 and 1966, poisoning the minds of a generation. The Workers' Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Teams were intended to ensure that China's intellectuals never again had the power to propagate a 'Black Line'. They were amongst the most important officially designated referents of the Cultural Revolution's egalitarian rhetoric.

(b) *Educated youth become workers and peasants.* Education had played a vital part in élite formation in China, even after the Communist victory in 1949. The obvious way to prevent intellectuals from regaining the positions of power from which they had been driven early in the Cultural Revolution was to break the connection between academic success and subsequent career paths. Accordingly, examination results were disregarded when students were assigned to jobs on leaving school. Many of the most brilliant students ended up as manual workers in factories and on farms. In all, somewhere between 12 million and 18 million young urban Chinese were sent to the countryside (For varying estimates, see Bernstein 1977, 2; Unger 1982, 168, 169; Yan & Gao 1996, 279). Children from 'bad' class or middle class families, who were generally the most able students, nearly all ended up in manual occupations. However, with academic

criteria irrelevant, children from red-class families sometimes did better, especially the children of revolutionary cadres who used family connections to secure better positions or join the PLA (cf. Unger 1982, 1965-6). This assault on meritocratic tendencies in Chinese society was another officially designated referent of the egalitarian rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution.

(c) *Worker-peasant-soldier students.* Students no longer entered university directly from school, but were nominated by their urban work units or rural brigades and communes. Academic performance was entirely irrelevant to the selection process, which was based officially upon class background and political behaviour. These criteria favoured red-class students and ensured the exclusion of students belonging to the black categories. Those chosen sometimes had limited education and little academic ability. They were called 'worker-peasant-soldier students', and they were normally expected to return to their work unit or commune on graduation and to do their share of manual labour. Again, this was an attempt to prevent the re-emergence of the meritocratic and technocratic élite which Mao believed had blocked the implementation of his policies and prevented China's transition to full socialism. It was of course represented as the fulfilment of the Cultural Revolution's egalitarian rhetoric.

(d) *Barefoot doctors.* During the Cultural Revolution, doctors shared the fate of other intellectuals. They were especially vulnerable because Mao publicly blamed them and the Health Ministry for the shortage of doctors in rural areas (conveniently ignoring the fact that after 1962 the overwhelming majority of new graduates were sent to rural areas). (Cell 1977, 66-7; Chang 1992, 568; Unger 1982, 232). Red Guards drove many doctors from 'bureaucratic élitist' hospitals and incarcerated them with other *niugui sheshen* in 'cow pens'. The doctors were then subjected to manual labour and thought reform in May 7 Cadre Schools, and eventually sent to practise amongst the workers and peasants, treating ailments 'at the front'. There was, however, still an acute shortage of doctors in rural areas - partly because the Cultural Revolution had disrupted the medical schools and

health system (cf. Chang 1992, 574). Mao's solution was to give peasants or rusticated urban youth a brief course of instruction, or perhaps just a copy of *A Barefoot Doctor's Manual*, then call them 'barefoot doctors'. 'It is not at all necessary to have so much formal training,' he said. 'They should mainly learn and raise their standards in practice.' (Chang 1992, 568). This was entirely consistent with his scorn for the bureaucratic, intellectual and technical élites against whom the Cultural Revolution was principally directed. 'The more books you read, the more stupid you become', he once said (Chang 1992, 568). So the barefoot doctors became an internationally famous 'New Born Thing of the Cultural Revolution' - an officially designated referent of its egalitarian rhetoric.

(e) *May 7 Cadre Schools.* Named after a well-publicized letter from Mao to Lin Biao of May 7, 1966, these schools proliferated from October 1968 when the *People's Daily* published a directive from Mao saying that 'The rustication of great numbers of cadres is an excellent opportunity for them to study new things. This should apply to all cadres with the exception of the elderly and infirm. Cadres on duty should be sent down for labour by turns.' (Yan & Gao 1996, 272). The cadre schools were rural labour camps supervised by PLA Propaganda Teams which 're-educated' government officials and intellectuals by compelling them to work like peasants while undergoing criticism and self-criticism. Their only reading matter was Mao's works, and even the writings of Marx and Lenin were banned (Yan & Gao 1996, 275). Those who 'graduated' from the cadre schools were regarded as rehabilitated and were then able to resume their normal duties. Cadres and intellectuals regarded as recalcitrant were refused graduation and kept in the camps. By the beginning of 1969 there were nearly 300 camps in Guangdong province alone, and over 100,000 cadres had been sent to them for re-education (Dittmer 1987, 178). The cadre schools were justified as a means of keeping cadres in touch with the lives of the peasants, and in that way were portrayed as a referent of the Cultural Revolution's anti-bureaucratic rhetoric. In reality, the schools were just a means of keeping the cadres nervous, obedient and politically correct. In the words of Wang Hongwen, a close associate of Mao

and Jiang Qing, 'All who disobey get sent to May 7 Cadre schools for labor.' (Yan & Gao 1996, 274). Neither Wang himself nor any other top official who remained in Mao's favour was ever sent down to the countryside or a May 7 Cadre School to get in touch with the lives of the peasants.

The New Born Things involved massive social restructuring designed to create the referents which the Maoist leadership saw as the fulfilment of the Cultural Revolution's stated goals. Once those referents were in place, they introduced a wide range of new, highly accessible assumptions into people's cognitive environments. It was now much simpler for cadres or soldiers to explain what Chairman Mao had wanted, for what he had wanted was now part of their lives.

Assumptions associated with the New Born Things also increased the relevance of the flood of propagandistic messages which all people were required to study, discuss and accept as part of Mao's process of continuing revolution. The interpretation of these messages was carefully controlled by the revival of centrally directed study, criticism and self-criticism. Indeed, this centrally controlled group activity was the key to restoring uniformity of interpretation. The revolutionary committees ensured that in the cities every neighbourhood committee set up study groups and that every work unit did likewise. In extreme cases, people spent half their working hours on political study and discussion. More often they spent two or three afternoons a week. After that, there were sometimes political meetings organized by the neighbourhood committees at night. There were strenuous attempts to extend the system to the villages, but these were only partly, and often temporarily, successful (Whyte 1974).

As before the Cultural Revolution, during study sessions cadres often explained the latest document, then people were required to say that they agreed with its message and suggest ways in which it could be applied to their own lives. They were also required to make self-criticisms in the light of the document, and they were pressed to criticise others whose behaviour did not measure up. This method of communicating a message is admirably calculated to elicit the feedback required to ensure uniformity of interpretation. If people had misinterpreted the document, this would emerge when they tried to

explain its implications for their lives. Their understanding of the document could be corrected, and if they needed new assumptions to understand its message, these could be supplied.

Communicating the message through study groups had the same persuasive effects as it had before the Cultural Revolution:

(a) It enabled cadres to elicit strong 'reference group effects' by manipulating the process of comment, criticism and self-criticism. By giving their own interpretation of the document, then inviting influential and politically reliable individuals to confirm that interpretation, cadres were able to establish the views of the reference group whose acceptance was an absolute precondition of good treatment.

(b) It ensured that the persuasive message was thoroughly processed, so that people formed schemas which connected it with other aspect of their thought and with their everyday lives. This aided recall of the message. It also forged connections with other assumptions which formed part of the Maoist world view, making them more accessible. They therefore became more likely to influence the selection and interpretation of later messages and experience, so that if other things were equal people saw the world increasingly through Maoist eyes.

(c) Prompting or example from others sometimes led people voluntarily to express 'correct' Maoist views. Expression of such views then tended to shift people's attitudes in the direction of the views expressed, as people inferred their attitudes from their words. In this way, the study groups mobilized the processes of 'persuasion through self -perception' which we discussed in chapter 1.

(d) In the study groups, people who made politically correct statements experienced the approval of cadres and political activists. Through processes of positive reinforcement, this tended to promote their belief in what they had said. At the same time, people who made incorrect statements were criticised.

Their faith in what they had said therefore tended to diminish as a result of negative reinforcement.

The effectiveness of these mechanisms of persuasion, of course, depended on whether there were countervailing influences. They could fail utterly to convert people to views which too brutally negated their own experience or damaged their own interests. And their effectiveness could be reduced if the Maoist message was not the only message - if it was undermined by voices which preached other doctrines. We shall see in chapter 9 that these are important qualifications. The new Maoist hierarchy was very successful, however, in ensuring that in all public discourse its message predominated over all others. As we shall see in the remainder of this chapter and the following two chapters, that message was delivered in a voice which was loud, insistent and, especially in the lives of urban Chinese, close to all-pervasive.

6.3 Controlling the Written Word: (1) the Press

During the 'free mobilization' phase of the Cultural Revolution, everyone used the same revolutionary language because linguistic conformity was a sign of revolutionary thought. However, revolutionary language could be used to preach revolutionary doctrines quite at odds with Mao's current line, and such doctrines were repeatedly espoused in the Red Guard press. As we saw in chapter 3, when Mao wanted to stress conformity to this Thought as the criterion of revolutionary virtue, 'Royalist' publications stressed the 'blood pedigree' theory as a way of preserving themselves and their families from attack. When Mao wanted to stress class origin as a way of bringing the 'Rebels' back under control, Rebel publications stressed conformity to his revolutionary line. And when Mao at last denounced armed struggle, some Red Guard publications continued to advocate force, choosing interpretive assumptions which led them to misinterpret or misrepresent his message.

Some Red guard publications were highly influential and had an extensive national readership. For a few months in 1967, for example, Qinghua University's *Jingangshan* had a circulation second only to the *People's Daily* (Dittmer 1974, 318). In part, this was because the Red

Guard tabloids had more real 'news' and less pure fiction than official publications. They printed rumours, informed gossip and information leaked by factions within the Party élite. They also practised some effective investigative journalism, printing and analysing information seized from Party records which the Maoist leadership would have preferred to keep secret. They were, on the whole, far more accurate and informative than the official press, and while they practised self-censorship they ignored official attempts to limit their number and to muzzle them. To the annoyance of the Party Centre they were the closest thing to a free press that China had had since 1949. Their fate when Mao decided to end the 'free mobilization' of the revolutionary masses was no surprise. They were one of his first targets, and in August 1968 Workers' Mao Thought Propaganda Teams occupied their offices and shut them down (Dittmer 1974, 318 n.7; Liu 1976, 117-8).

Once the 'January storm' in 1967 had broken the power of the Party, the official press began to emphasise Mao's Thought as the focus of a new revolutionary order. This was reflected in the rise in the number of quotations from Mao in the *People's Daily*. To plot the trend, I have counted the number of Mao-quotes on the first two pages of the newspaper on the first day of every month from 1950 to 1976. Table 6.1 gives the annual totals of those quotes.

TABLE 6.1

Quotations from Mao Zedong on First Two Pages of *People's Daily* on First Day of Each Month: (Yearly Totals 1950-1980)

Year	Quotes (no.)	Year	Quotes (no.)
1950	0	1966	18
1951	7	1967	89
1952	11*	1968	136
1953	6	1969	131
1954	3	1970	207
1955	4	1971	198
1956	2	1972	90
1957	1	1973	78
1958	6	1974	61
1959	4	1975	85
1960	7	1976	138
1961	6	1977	138
1962	6	1978	3
1963	8	1979	4
1964	7	1980	1
1965	11		

* One issue devoted three pages to printing the entire text of Mao's *On Contradiction.* This has been counted as a single quotation.

The trends revealed in the table can be summarized and explained as follows:

1. Mao-quotes were rare before the Cultural Revolution, and only a little more common in 1966 when there was more emphasis on attacking 'capitalist roaders', 'monsters and demons' and other class enemies than on spending lengthy periods studying and memorizing Mao's word.

2. The number of quotes rose sharply in 1967 as Mao, Lin Biao and the Central Cultural Revolution Group sought to restore order and to consolidate their victory over the Party by constructing a new revolutionary order in which Mao's word was the symbol of unity. The quotations reached their peak between 1968 and 1971 as peace was restored and full-scale institutionalised Mao-worship was instituted throughout China. In those years, indeed, a typical issue of the *People's Daily* quoted Mao 32 times more often than did a typical issue in the period 1950-64.

3. Mao was quoted less from 1972 to 1975 partly because the death and disgrace of Lin Biao in late 1971 discredited the excesses of Mao-worship with which he was associated. Moreover, after Lin Biao's death the moderate Zhou Enlai gained great power at the *People's Daily* , partially breaking the monopoly which Jiang Qing, Yao Wenyuan, Zhang Chunqiao and their radical colleagues had enjoyed over China's media (Dittmer 1987, 188). However, despite Zhou's influence the number of quotes remained far greater than before the Cultural Revolution, and the radicals remained influential in other media.

4. When Zhou Enlai died in January 1976 and his ally Deng Xiaoping lost power soon after, Mao-quotes returned to the same high level as in 1968-69 . This reflected the fact that Jiang Qing and her colleagues had regained full control of the *People's Daily*.

The great increase in Mao-quotes in the *People's Daily* during the Cultural Revolution occurred despite the fact that from 1966 to 1973 and again in 1976 the front page was sometimes devoted in whole or in part to a portrait of Mao. It was matched by an increase in the extent to which the media incorporated Mao's words without quotation marks into articles, editorials and broadcasts, although this is more difficult to quantify. What is clear is that during the institutional phase of the Cultural Revolution the media strengthened the trend towards quoting Mao and speaking in pidgin-Mao which had emerged in the years of 'free mobilization'.

Lin Biao and the cultural radicals around Jiang Qing promoted Mao's word not only as a symbol of unity, but also in the belief that the word somehow spoke for itself and that if everyone learned it by heart this would somehow bring uniformity of interpretation and even of action. Lin even proposed that people could get around difficulties in understanding what Mao wanted 'by simply memorizing isolated quotations , even entire sections, from his writings, and carrying them out to the letter.' (Dittmer 1987, 118). This was, of course, linguistically naive, for it neglected the vital role of the context of interpretation in reference assignment. However, the cult of quotations emphasised that Mao's word, whatever it meant, was the criterion of

good and bad. Constant exposure ensured that a quotation from Mao often came to mind as people made moral and political decisions. When that happened, the semantic meaning of the quotation combined in the process of reference assignment with whatever interpretive assumptions were most readily available. In that indirect way, Mao-quotes sometimes influenced decisions. What must be emphasised is that they influenced decisions *in the direction desired by the Maoist leadership* only when those who interpreted the quotations shared their leaders' interpretive assumptions. This is why the resurrection of institutions of centralized control was vital. Only then could people's interpretive assumptions be influenced by social engineering such as the implementation of the 'New Born Things'; and only then could those assumptions be monitored and corrected in study groups and meetings devoted to criticism and self-criticism. Control of the word had to be supplemented by control of the interpretive context to produce uniformity of thought. The new institutions of centralised control went a long way, but by no means the whole way, towards supplying the necessary supplement.

6.4 Controlling the Written Word: (2) Dictionaries

If the *People's Daily* quoted Mao more than ever before, so did everything else printed in China. This extended even to dictionaries. To illustrate this, I will compare entries in the 1965 edition of *A New English-Chinese Dictionary* with matching entries in the new edition published after six years of revision in 1976, then reprinted with minor corrections until Deng Xiaoping's reforms consigned it to oblivion in the 1980s. Both dictionaries were the standard medium-sized English-Chinese reference works of their day, large enough to include sentences and phrases illustrating the use of English words whose meaning they explained. The two columns on the next page compare illustrations of word use in the 1965 edition with those in the 1976 edition.

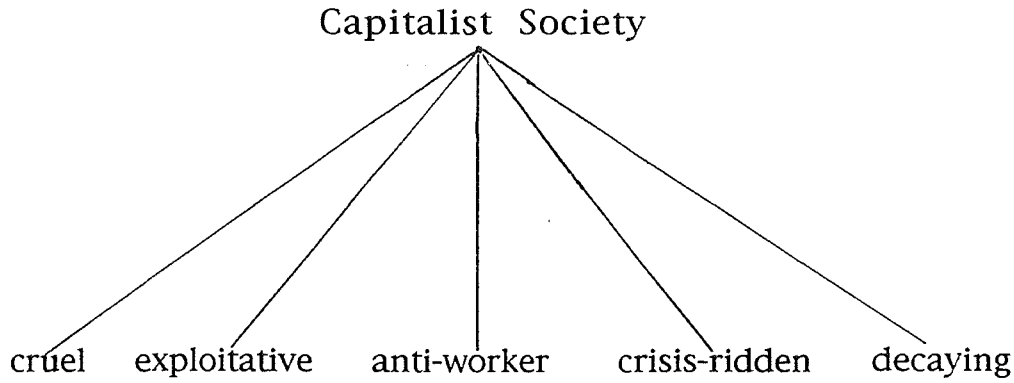
1965 EDITION	1976 EDITION
learn v. He learns very fast / I am yet to learn / I learnt it from him / learn by rote.	learn v. Learn from Comrade Lei Feng [a model of revolutionary self-sacrifice] / learn from past mistakes to avoid future ones / learn warfare through warfare [Mao quote] / learn to swim [Mao quote].
apply v. Apply a rule to a case / apply a plaster to a wound / apply money to the payment of a debt.	apply v. It is necessary to master Marxist theory and apply it, master it for the sole purpose of applying it [Mao quote] / apply oneself to studying Chairman Mao's works.
teach v. Teach a child to read / this will teach you to speak the truth/ teach a dog to beg.	teach v. the principle of officers teaching soldiers, soldiers teaching officers and soldiers teaching each other [Mao quote] / Chairman Mao teaches us to serve the people heart and soul / practice in struggle has taught us that unity means strength.
intellectual n. The intellectuals of a country.	intellectual n. Intellectuals must integrate themselves with the workers and peasants.
line n. Just a line to tell you that ... / I am in the grocery line / what line (of business) are you in? / know when to draw a line.	line n. The Party line / draw a clear line of demarcation between the enemy and ourselves / resolutely wipe out any aggressors who dare to cross the line into our territory / struggle between the two lines
team n. Football team / team spirit / inspection team.	team n. A Workers' Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Team.

The 1965 edition, it is clear, generally illustrated its entries with sentences and phrases typical of the spoken and written language of native speakers of English. The 1976 edition, by contrast, frequently translated into English the Mao-quotes, slogans and clichés which dominated Chinese political life. When it failed to find revolutionary illustrations of word use, it was not for want of trying.

The 1976 dictionary drummed into its users assumptions systematically linked to core concepts in the Maoist world view. Consider the lessons on the nature of capitalist society contained in illustrative examples attached to words as diverse as 'capital', 'sweep', 'unemployed', 'western', 'weary' and 'what':

> capital n. Capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt / the antagonism between labour and capital.
>
> exploit v. The workers in capitalist society are cruelly exploited by the capitalists.
>
> what pron. They are what is called "the lowly" in capitalist society.
>
> unemployed a. Unemployed workers in capitalist society.
>
> unemployment n. Unemployment is increasing in the capitalist countries.
>
> sweep v. Another storm of economic crisis has swept over the capitalist world.
>
> western a. The decaying Western capitalist society.
>
> weary a. Many young people in capitalist countries are weary of the way of life there.

These illustrations associated capitalism with a series of inter-related attributes, suggesting to dictionary users a schematic model of capitalist society in which every term carried a negative evaluation:



This was in fact precisely the schema-stereotype of capitalist society suggested by the Chinese Communist Party's propaganda from the time of its foundation in 1921. The schema conditioned people to hate capitalist society by linking it with opprobrious terms. Moreover, the schema was linked to a body of theory explaining the nature of capitalist exploitation, the role of capitalism in world history, and the inevitability of its destruction at the hands of the proletariat. So regular users of the 1976 dictionary were not only being subjected to higher order conditioning, but were being systematically reminded of the theoretical assumptions of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist theory. Through a process of 'spreading activation', the dictionary entries repeatedly placed those assumptions 'on call', making them more accessible when they were required to interpret the world or understand political utterances. In this way the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist world view was strengthened by linguistic engineering.

It is instructive to compare what the 1976 dictionary says about capitalist society with what it says about the Communist Party. The qualities of that Party are stated or implied in sentences illustrating the use of words as diverse as *party, live, attribute, what, whatever* and *wherever*:

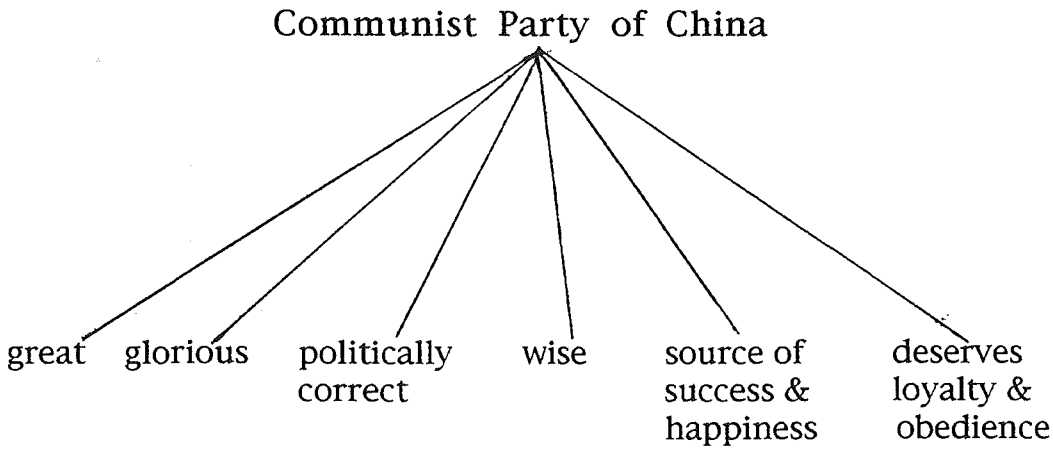
> party n. Ours is a great Party, a glorious Party, a correct Party. [This was a Mao-quote].
>
> live v. Without the Party and Chairman Mao I could not have lived to see today's happiness.
>
> attribute v. We attribute all our successes to the wise leadership of the Communist Party of China.

what pron. To fulfil the task requires of us great efforts, and, what is more important, loyalty to the Party.

whatever pron. We'll do what the Party calls upon us to do.

wherever adv. We will go wherever the Party directs us.

These attributes had a consistent pattern, suggesting to dictionary users a schema-stereotype of the Communist Party in which all the terms carried positive evaluations:



These uniformly positive attributes reflected the fact that the Communist Party was once again regarded, officially, as a pliant tool of Mao Zedong's Thought. The Party machinery at the national level had resumed its normal functions in October 1968 when the Twelfth Plenum of the Ninth Party Congress had been held. Liu Shaoqi - who had been kept technically in office to justify continued attacks on the Party's 'revisionism' - was expelled, and a revised draft of the Party Constitution was adopted. By that stage, too, the Campaign to Cleanse the Class Ranks - aimed in the first instance at purifying the Party - was well advanced, so for the first time since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution *Red Flag* was able to proclaim that 'Our Party is a great, glorious and correct Party', describing the Party's infiltration by bourgeois power holders as a thing of the past (Lee 1978, 301). By the time the revision of the English-Chinese dictionary began in 1970, the Party was once more charged with guiding the masses' revolutionary activism. So the language of English-Chinese dictionaries, like everything else printed in China, revived the positive schema of the

Communist Party which had been presented before the Cultural Revolution. As always, official language served politics.

6.5 Controlling the Written Word: (3) Private Letters

Control of the written word extended, less formally, systematically and effectively, to private correspondence. Letters to and from foreign countries were frequently opened by the Public Security Service, and in any case were relatively rare because people with foreign connections were suspected of being spies. Domestic mail was monitored less systematically by the central authorities, but the Party secretaries who controlled the work units sometimes exercised their right to inspect incoming and outgoing correspondence. They could also, if they suspected that something was amiss, order a search of people's private belongings for hidden correspondence or anything else. Some people still, of course, put imprudent words on paper, and they sometimes paid the price. One young man interviewed by Lowell Dittmer told his girlfriend in a letter that he was putting on a false show of revolutionary virtue in an attempt to get to college, but the letter was intercepted. His future was ruined, so he escaped to Hong Kong (Dittmer 1987, 159-60).

Most people very sensibly ensured that everything which they wrote could withstand scrutiny. One way of doing this was to follow very carefully the prescribed revolutionary formulae. Letters always began with 'Long live Chairman Mao', with a quotation from his works, or with a revolutionary slogan. Every letter also had to end on a revolutionary note. Sometimes this was done with another slogan, such as 'Long live the success of Chairman Mao's Revolutionary Line!' Frequently, though, the revolutionary tone was achieved by adapting a traditional formula. Before 1949, the following formula was commonly used at the end of a letter addressed to a person who was old or of higher social status than the sender:

ci zhi jingli
here extend salute
'With high respect'.

This formula lingered on after the Communist victory, but during the Cultural Revolution it was abandoned entirely. The reason was, of course, that the Cultural Revolution was amongst other things a revolt of the young against the old and of the 'revolutionary masses' against 'persons in authority following the capitalist road'. In this context, the formula expressed precisely those values against which the Cultural Revolution was directed. As argued by Ji, Kuiper & Shu (1990), the formula was adapted to make it properly revolutionary in three ways:

(1) *ci zhi geming jingli!*
here extend revolutionary salute!
'With revolutionary greetings!'

(2) *ci zhi wuchanjieji jingli!*
here extend proletarian salute!
'With proletarian greetings!'

(3) *ci zhi wuchanjieji geming jingli!*
here extend proletarian revolutionary salute!
'With proletarian revolutionary greetings!'

When *geming* (revolutionary) and *wuchanjieji* (proletarian) form part of its context of interpretation, *jingli* loses the connotations of 'respect' associated with its use in the old formula. It means simply 'salutations' or 'greetings', and has nothing to do with 'saluting' or 'greeting' a superior. So age and social status were irrelevant to the employment of the new formulae. Instead, political standing or class status determined who could use these greetings and whom they used them to address. People who used the first formula ('With revolutionary greetings') had to be recognized as possessing a genuinely revolutionary ideology. This generally excluded those with 'bad' class backgrounds, for they were widely regarded as unpromising revolutionary material. Those who used the second and third formulae had in addition to be classified as workers to justify the adjective *wuchanjieji* ('proletarian'). Finally, these formulae were used to address only 'comrades' - those who belonged to 'the people' rather than 'the enemy'. Those with bad class backgrounds were usually suspected of being secret class enemies, so they were addressed with the new formulae only in those rare cases in which they managed to establish their revolutionary credentials. For the most part, they were addressed with standardised terms of abuse.

So while the formulae expressed and consolidated revolutionary solidarity, they were also a weapon in the class war.

Equally pervasive were the revolutionary formulae analysed by Ji, Kuiper & Shu (1990) which replaced traditional deference formulae incompatible with the new political climate. Before 1949 educated Chinese had sometimes used an idiomatic expression as a deference formula to end a formal speech or letter:

qing yu haihan
'Please be magnanimous enough to forgive'
or
qing duo baohan
'Please be magnanimous enough to tolerate'.

As Ji, Kuiper and Shu (1990) have pointed out, semantically these formulae implied that their user had made errors or had shortcomings and was asking to be excused; however, they were not necessarily apologetic expressions in a pragmatic sense. They simply showed the user's modesty and were thus a form of deference behaviour. In Mao's China, however, mock modesty was not enough. Nor was error to be tolerated or forgiven: 'things which are wrong and erroneous must be criticised and corrected.' In small group meetings, individuals were regularly forced to express their views, invite criticism, then criticise the views of others. Always, the criterion was whether the views expressed were in accordance with the latest Party directives and Mao's Thought (Whyte 1974). So the traditional deference formulae were replaced by three new ones more in keeping with the practice of revolutionary criticism:

(1) *qing piping bangzhu*
please criticise help
'Please criticise and help'

(2) *qing piping zhizheng*
please criticise correct
'Please criticise and correct'

(3) *huanying piping*
welcome criticism
'I welcome criticism'

These new formulae were well established by 1966, but because the Cultural Revolution stirred up a frenzy of criticism and self-criticism they popped up more frequently than ever before. Like their predecessors, they were used at the end of a speech or letter to indicate the user's modesty. However, they not only implied semantically that the person who used them may have made errors, but they did so pragmatically. Moreover, as Ji, Kuiper & Shu (1990, 65) point out, the user of the new formulae took a different attitude towards the implicit errors or shortcomings. Instead of asking to be excused, the user asked for criticism. In revolutionary China, all were expected to invite criticism to ensure that their words and their lives were faithful to the letter and the spirit of Mao's Thought.

Correspondents had not only to observe revolutionary conventions when opening and closing letters, but to censor the letters' contents and ensure that they were larded with stock expressions of revolutionary piety. Correspondents who had been locked up for political mistakes were particularly careful, for they knew that all their letters would be inspected. The following letters, written by the same man, were typical of those written by prisoners:

August 7, 1968

WISHING CHAIRMAN MAO LONGEVITY!
LONG LIVE CHAIRMAN MAO!

Dear Father and Mother,

I hope you are well.

As I didn't pay attention to the revered Chairman Mao's teaching and didn't act according to his directives, I have committed serious crimes and made very bad errors. The revolutionary masses, in order to rescue me, have sent me to the Public Security Bureau for reeducation. Now I'm studying and going through ideological reform in the Mao Zedong Thought Study Course under the leadership of the People's Liberation Army. Do not worry. I'm determined to turn over a new leaf.... [Feng 1991, 118].

March 8, 1975

Chairman Mao teaches us:
THE CHANGE IN ONE'S OUTLOOK
IS A FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE.

Dear (wife's name),

Your two letters this month have reached me. I understand that you're worried I haven't reformed myself conscientiously enough. I feel very contrite towards you and our son. I have realized the seriousness of my mistakes in humble gratitude to the reeducation given me by the chief warden. I'm determined to deepen my understanding of my guilt though studying the theory of proletarian dictatorship ....

Please do not worry. I won't do anything to hurt you in the future. Each time I see your tearstains on the envelope and the letter brings your image to me ....

I wrongly refused to see the seriousness of my crimes. I wouldn't open my heart and soul to our leaders, but instead confided my true feelings secretly to some individuals .... I failed our Party, the chief warden, you, and our son. From now on I will always heed the chief warden's teachings. I have realized that the Party is my true family. They will guide me on the ideologically correct path. For as Chairman Mao has said, "There will always be a bright future for those who have seen the error of their ways."...

One of my major problems is my lack of a clear understanding of my crimes. Under the guidance of the chief, I will study official documents and papers including Yao Wenyuan's "On the Social Basis of Lin Biao's Anti-Party Clique" to discover the social root causes of my guilt .... [Feng 1991, 119-20].

The only sincere sentiments in these letters were their author's expressions of concern for his family. Reflecting on what he wrote, he told Feng Jicai, 'You see what I mean about writing for the chief warden? I was asked to trace the class roots of my crimes. I'm a worker, how in hell can I find a bourgeois root? I had to admit to crimes I didn't do and criticise myself ...' (Feng 1991, 120).

Even people who had never been in trouble usually 'put politics in command' of their correspondence. They knew that anything they wrote might one day be held against them. Besides, they were sometimes genuinely concerned to impress even family members with their revolutionary ardour. Take the following letter from a student sent to the countryside:

September 15, 1969

LONG LIVE CHAIRMAN MAO

Hi Dad!

I got your letter and have read it carefully. I'd like to share a few of my own thoughts with you below, and hope you'll criticize and correct my errors.

At the Tenth Plenary Session of the Eighth Central Committee of the Communist Party, our great leader Chairman Mao Brilliantly pointed out that on the basis of Marxist-Leninist theory on class and class struggle, the 'four existences' would remain during the entire transition period in a socialist society. He stressed that we must discuss the 'two-line struggle' every year, every month, every day. [There follows a long discussion of Mao's Thought and current political developments].

... There are many intellectuals in the company, and hence many problems. I want to constantly strengthen my ideological reform and endeavour to season myself so that I will become a person who will give Chairman Mao no worries.

Take care of your health, Dad!

Long live the success of Chairman Mao's revolutionary line!

Your son,
XX

P.S. I received the things you asked my classmate to bring.
P.P.S. It's harvest time already and we're busy again. And it's beginning to get cold here. [Feng 1991, 9-11].

Looking back in the 1980s, the author of this letter said, 'Don't you think that letter's weird? That's how we students wrote back then. Every last one of us. And those things weren't written for outsiders, but for our own families. Revolution became part of everything.' (Feng 1991, 11). Nearly all Chinese people who retain letters from the years of the Cultural Revolution now regard them as 'weird'. But they all know why they wrote like that. Quite apart from the fact that some were enthusiastic revolutionaries, they all knew something else: that to write a 'non-political' letter was to commit the bourgeois error of subordinating the political to the personal. So almost everyone who wrote letters communicated through the discourse of Maoism, using 'correct' political language to express 'correct' political sentiments. People who wanted to extract personal information from the correspondence often had to read between the lines. Only a few brave souls wrote letters which flouted the conventions. The ostensible

political correctness of the written word during the Cultural Revolution's institutional phase was very nearly complete.

6.6 Orchestrating the Spoken Word: Linguistic Rituals and Mao-Worship

The linguistic rituals of Mao-worship were associated with a great campaign called the Three Loyalties and the Four Boundless Loves. The Three Loyalties were loyalty to Chairman Mao, loyalty to his Thought and loyalty to his revolutionary line, while the Four Boundless Loves were love for Chairman Mao, love for his Thought, love for his proletarian revolutionary line and love for his proletarian revolutionary headquarters. People had repeatedly to show their boundless love and loyalty towards all these things. Lin Biao himself set the example, showing his loyalty to Mao's Thought by saying that even though he could not at times 'follow the Chairman's thoughts', he still acted in accordance with them: 'we must carry out not only those instructions [whose rationale] we understand, but also those [whose rationale] we fail to understand for the moment, and must try to understand them in the course of carrying them out.' There was no danger in blind obedience, for Lin was convinced, or so he said, that 'Every sentence of Chairman Mao's works is a Truth, one single sentence of his surpasses ten thousand of ours.' (Quoted in Dittmer 1987, 118).

Under Lin's influence the Mao cult was expressed in massive projects which helped to raise the prominence of Mao-worshipping assumptions in the cognitive environments of most Chinese. Massive statues of Mao began to appear in public places. I was one of the millions of Chinese children photographed in front of such statues, clutching the Little Red Book to my breast. All over China, places associated with Mao's life were sanctified, becoming shrines visited by pilgrims who took perhaps 'a bit of earth or bottle of water as mementos.' (Dittmer 1987, 119). Worship of Mao was also encouraged by numerous exhibition halls, facing towards the revolutionary east, which told the story of his life. Some of these were huge. In Tianjin, for example, the railway station became a Mao Zedong Thought lecture hall. It was dominated by a huge statue of Mao, together with over a

hundred portraits and hundreds of quotations and posters. Like countless other children, I was taken to visit it, paying homage to China's saviour.

These changes to the physical environment reminded people constantly about Mao and his teachings, increasing the accessibility of assumptions which formed the context of interpretation of the verbal rituals which proliferated during the institutional phase of the Cultural Revolution. On getting out of bed in the morning, people were supposed to set the tone of the day by saying something like 'Carry the revolution through to the end!' or 'Fight selfishness!' For the Chinese people, well drilled in the assumptions of Mao Zedong Thought, this latter slogan did not mean what it would have meant to a Christian or a Buddhist. Within the context of interpretation fostered by Mao's writings, as well as by the novels, revolutionary model operas and other propaganda of the Cultural Revolution, it meant something far more specific: that they had to fight any tendency to fulfil merely personal needs or desires, rather than devoting all their energies to the revolution. In other words, educated youth working as peasants, factory hands or dockers had to stop hankering after 'better' jobs; the peasants had to stop supplementing their incomes with private production, rather than devoting themselves wholeheartedly to collective labour; young men and women had to contract marriages which would foster revolutionary commitment, rather than entering into relationships out of selfish, bourgeois love; and once married, they had to set aside merely personal feelings, accepting cheerfully any instruction that they live most of their lives apart, building socialism in different parts of China.

When people went to bed, they were meant to affirm their continuing commitment to the revolution with a slogan like 'Think of Chairman Mao Day and Night!' or 'Never forget class struggle!' Again, the interpretation of these slogans depended upon assumptions made instantly accessible by repeated exposure to Mao's writings, to revolutionary model operas and novels, to the stories which people had heard in 'speak bitterness' sessions, to what they had seen in class education exhibitions halls, and to the experience of 'struggle and criticism sessions' against alleged class enemies. 'Remembering Chairman Mao' did not mean remembering his benevolent face, but

keeping his teachings constantly in mind while recalling how he had saved the workers and peasants from oppression and made them the masters of their own country. 'Never forgetting class struggle' meant recalling the 'bitter past', hating unreformed members of the black categories, scrutinizing one's associates for signs that they might have links with class enemies or might themselves be class enemies, and struggling ruthlessly against those who took the enemy's side.

Almost everyone knew what these slogans meant. It would have been nearly impossible *not* to know, given that they were repeatedly explained, used in numerous contexts, and reinforced by the carefully contrived structures of daily life and by myriad cues from the physical environment. It was another thing altogether to get people to incorporate them into their private lives. Try as they might, the Maoist leaders could not make people into ciphers, mouthing every slogan on cue. Within the family and amongst friends, sloganeering could be embarrassing if it was too ostentatious, or if it took place in inappropriate contexts. Those who actually uttered these slogans first thing in the morning or just before bed at night were probably a minority. Mao's totalitarian ideal had a devastating impact on the Chinese people, but at no stage did the practice fully match the ideal.

Verbal rituals became part of the routine of everyday life. The model was often the army, where the rites of worship had gone to extraordinary lengths. In Chen Village, for example, peasant families adopted the military custom of worshipping Mao before every meal. Led by the family head, they bowed to his portrait, recited Mao-quotes, sang 'The East Is Red' then recited a 'Maoist grace-before-meals'. The following 'grace' was the most common:

> We respectfully wish a long life to the reddest red sun in our hearts, the great leader Chairman Mao. And to Vice Chairman Lin Biao's health: may he forever be healthy. Having been liberated by the land reform we will never forget the Communist Party, and in revolution we will forever follow Chairman Mao! [Chan, Madsen & Unger 1984, 170].

The 'Maoist grace' was recited only in some regions, and was almost unknown in the predominantly academic community in which I lived in Tianjin. However, an attempt was made to ensure that other

rituals did become universal. Throughout China, for instance, Revolutionary Committees sought to impose the custom of greeting comrades with a shared revolutionary quotation. To give an example, if the person initiating the greeting said 'Sailing the seas depends on the helmsman ...', the person addressed was supposed to complete the quotation by responding, 'Making revolution depends on Mao Zedong's Thought.' (Cf. Chang 1992, 531). This made loyalty to Mao the common currency of social relationships, and it placed pressure on people to ensure that they knew all the common Mao-quotes by heart. However, the ritual did not have as much impact as the Maoist leadership desired, for amongst family and friends most people continued the traditional *ni hao* ('how are you?') or *chi fan le ma* ('have you eaten?'). They saved the 'quotation greeting' for more formal contexts or for encounters with people who might expect it. In this way, the 'public language' of the Chinese people diverged ever more markedly from their private language.

The Cultural Revolution also had an impact on greeting formulae in the schools. Before the Cultural Revolution, when the teacher entered the classroom the class monitor told the students to stand up. Teacher and student then exchanged greetings using the following fixed, formulaic expressions:

Teacher: *tongxuemen hao!*
students well
'How do you do, everybody?'

Students: *laoshi hao!*
teacher well
'How do you do, teacher?'

Semantically, there was no difference between the *'hao'* which greeted the teacher and the *'hao'* which greeted the 'students'. Pragmatically, however, there was a great difference. The *'hao'* uttered by the students had as its context of interpretation the fact that the students were standing as a mark of respect, the fact that the accompanying word *laoshi* ('teacher') still carried some of its traditional prestige, and the fact that the teacher was the only person in the room who was greeted as an individual. In this context, the words uttered by the students were not only a greeting but a mark of respect.

When the schools reopened in late 1968, however, the situation of the teachers had changed. Most had been labelled 'monsters and demons', 'bourgeois reactionary authorities', and so on. They were also, by definition, 'intellectuals' in the Chinese sense of the term, and had been added to a revised and extended version of the 'black categories', which now included not only landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements and Rightists, but also renegades, enemy agents and capitalist roaders, with intellectuals ninth and last. To show the contempt in which they were held, they were designated the 'stinking ninth category'. It was therefore inappropriate for students to greet teachers in the traditional respectful manner. The problem was solved by abolishing greetings at the beginning of the class altogether.

Before the first class of each day, both students and teachers engaged in the ritual of 'asking for instructions in the morning'. This ritual was also practised in offices, factories, and even amongst peasants in the villages. Students and teachers, like workers or peasants, stood in front of Mao's portrait and raised their Little Red Books head-high; then, in response to introductory words from a revolutionary leader, they chanted a litany whose first part went like this:

Leader: *rang women jing zhu Mao zhixi ...*
let us respectfully wish Mao chairman ...
'Let's respectfully wish Chairman Mao ...'

People: ... *wanshouwuqiang!* (Said three times).
... ten thousand years without limit!
'... an infinitely long life!'

The expression *wanshouwuqiang* was a traditional idiom once used only as a form of greeting for the Chinese emperors, whose elevated status Mao had by now far surpassed. It was followed immediately by the second part of the litany, which paid a less imperial tribute to Mao's 'good student' and designated successor, the sickly Lin Biao:

Leader: *zhu Lin fu zhuxi shenti jiangkang ...*
wish Lin vice chairman body healthy ...
'Wish Vice-chairman Lin good health ...'

People: *... yongyuan jiankang!* (Said twice).
... always healthy!
'... Good health forever!'

Those present then sang 'The East Is Red' or perhaps 'Sailing the Seas Depends on the Helmsman' and read quotations from the Little Red Book to guide their actions during the day. Significantly, in schools, it was the student monitor who led the proceedings. The teacher was reduced to the status of one worshipper amongst many, reflecting the lowered status of the traditional intellectual and bureaucratic élites which Mao blamed for the frustration of his plans.

People in a lot of urban workplaces, some schools and many rural areas supplemented the ritual of 'asking for instructions in the morning' with the practice of 'reporting back in the evening' (Chang 1992, 530-31; Liang & Shapiro 1983, 179-80; Min 1993, 54; Feng 1991, 96; Gao 1987, 317-318). After completing the day's activities, they assembled in front of Chairman Mao's portrait, sang songs of Mao-worship, then confessed their shortcomings in the light of the principles of Mao's Thought: 'Chairman Mao, today I did this and made such and such a mistake ....' (Feng 1991, 96). Most people of course tried to avoid confessing anything really serious, and the politically correct confession became a well-practised art. But even when people just went through the motions they gave public consent to the idea that in all their actions they were responsible to Mao, and that his Thought was the criterion of right and wrong.

Most of the verbal ritual of Mao worship gave religious satisfaction to devoted revolutionaries but provided little excitement. However, at schools, universities, workplaces, and even on the streets, worship became fun for the nimble-footed as teachers and cadres popularized loyalty dances. Before work, after work, during the morning break, at political meetings, or whenever they felt like it, people formed a big circle and danced while singing a hymn of love and praise:

Beloved Chairman Mao, beloved Chairman Mao,
You are the Red Sun in our hearts.
We have so many words in our hearts
Which were want to tell you.
Tens of thousands of red hearts
Turn towards Beijing.
Tens of thousands of smiling faces
Turn towards the Red Sun.
We wish our Great Leader Chairman Mao
A long long life, a long long life.

The loyalty dance was taught even to the peasants in the south of China, where there was no tradition of rural dancing. Clumsy and embarrassed, they performed the dance and sang the accompanying song at their evening political meetings (Chan, Madsen & Unger 1984, 169).

Once the Cultural Revolution was over, many people were quick to describe these forms of Mao-worship as part of a deification movement (*zaoshen yundong*). They were right, of course, but the rituals and formulae which deified Mao and legitimated his rule were much more than this. From the point of view of the rulers, the scripts were a way of telling 'the people' what to think - those same revolutionary masses in whose name the Maoist leaders ruled and whom in fact they despised. Anchee Min, chosen to star in the film version of the revolutionary opera *Red Azalea*, attributes the following sentiments to the film's director, who was both her lover and a senior cultural official close to Jiang Qing:

> Who do you think people are? They are walking corpses. What do people know? The only thing they know is fear. That is why they need authority. They need to be told what to do. They need a wise emperor. It's been that way for five thousand years. They believe what rulers make them believe. That is why there are intellectual formulas. The operas are a way to shape their minds, to keep their minds where they should be.
>
> [Min 1993, 237].

What applied to the operatic formulae, of course, applied to all the formulae of the Cultural Revolution. Formulae were simple, they could be learned by heart, they were easily transmitted to China's hundreds of millions of illiterates, and anyone who refused to speak in the proper formulaic fashion could be identified instantly as a potential class

enemy and punished. So the formulae, as well as influencing minds, were a powerful instrument for controlling behaviour. And behaviour, through modelling effects and reference group effects, in turn exerted still more influence on minds.

Formulae, too, were an agent of persuasion and control which abetted Mao's purpose of chastening and controlling the pre-Cultural Revolution élites. University professors, school teachers, writers, doctors, scientists and bureaucrats could easily have coped with more sophisticated methods of ideological instruction. Instead, they were forced to memorize the same formulae as everyone else, then recite political platitudes and worship Mao in the same words as illiterate peasants. Under Mao, all Chinese were equal, subject to his will. This universal fact, which explains the sycophancy of Lin Biao and the forbearance of Jiang Qing, was expressed and enforced by the universal recitation of the formulae.

From the point of view of the ruled, the formulae represented the hope of safety. In a country where everything was political, the only totally safe political action was to promote and recite the formulae of Mao-worship. Incantation of the formulae started at the top, where Mao's immediate subordinates and the highest Party officials set the example. Under them, the Revolutionary Committees discovered that 'the safest and most rewarding course of action was to do nothing, except promote the worship of Mao - and, of course, continue to engage in political persecutions.' (Chang 1992, 531). For ordinary people, the formulae could be a safe way of expressing a genuine devotion to Mao - a mode of worship with none of the risks associated with improvised expressions of commitment. For believers, they were a satisfying currency of social interchange, a reassurance that others were believers too. For unbelievers, they were a mask, hiding deviant thoughts. For everyone, they were a passport which had to be presented many times a day - a passport to continued survival.

It was easy to make people recite the formulae, at least in public. It was much more difficult to determine, without further guidance, what their implications were. When those who performed the loyalty dance told Mao 'We have so many words in our hearts / Which we want to tell you', they were uncertain *what* words, outside the formulae, were

politically acceptable. When the peasants of Chen Village vowed at mealtimes that 'in revolution we will forever follow Chairman Mao', they had many conflicting ideas about what direction to take. So often, in their lives, a later policy had contradicted an earlier one, with the earlier policy condemned as 'revisionist' or 'left adventurist', or whatever. The problem arose from the fact that both policies had been promulgated in Mao's name. So the formulae had no definite implications for action, and once the 'free mobilization' phase of the Cultural Revolution was over ordinary people did not dare decide for themselves what road Chairman Mao wanted them to travel. They had all, at various times, been proved wrong. To follow their Great Leader, they needed explicit instructions for every step they took, and they still had to be watched and corrected because they so often misinterpreted those instructions. The Maoist dream of a revolutionary people programmed by formulae, propaganda and directives to follow the correct path remained a fantasy. Words could be translated into action only under the supervision of a coercive hierarchy. This was the reality which underpinned the new structures of authority during the institutional phase of the Cultural Revolution.

CHAPTER 7

CONTROLLING CULTURE: LITERATURE AND DRAMATIC ART

7.1 Literature and Art in Maoist Theory and Cultural Revolution Practice.

In the field of literature and art, the Cultural Revolution extended the dominant line of thinking in Mao's celebrated 'Talks at the Yenan [Yan'an] Forum on Literature and Art', delivered in May 1942 (Mao 1942b). I say 'the dominant line of thinking' because Mao, in characteristic fashion, wanted to have it both ways. On the one hand, he argued that 'Revolutionary literature and art should create a variety of characters out of real life', that they should be based on familiarity with 'the rich, lively language of the masses' and that they should avoid 'the "poster and slogan style" which is correct in political viewpoint but lacking in artistic power.' (Mao 1942b, 254, 266, 276). On the other hand, most of what Mao said fostered precisely the 'poster and slogan style' which he abhorred:

> There is in fact no such thing as art for art's sake, art that stands above classes, art that is detached from or independent of politics. Proletarian literature and art are part of the whole proletarian revolutionary cause; they are, as Lenin said, cogs and wheels in the whole revolutionary machine. Therefore, Party work in literature and art ... is subordinated to the revolutionary tasks set by the party in a given revolutionary period. [Mao 1942b, 271].

He argued that 'each class in every class society has its own political and artistic criteria' and that 'all classes in all class societies invariably put the political criterion first and the artistic criterion second.' Accordingly, he condemned reactionary works with artistic merit as particularly 'poisonous', he directed proletarian writers to 'eulogize not the bourgeoisie but the proletariat', and he announced:

> All the dark forces harming the masses of the people must be exposed and all the revolutionary struggles of the masses of the people must be extolled; this is the fundamental task of revolutionary writers and artists. [Mao 1942b, 275, 278, 278].

These views fostered a literature which depicted a world in which the only important thing was the struggle between righteous revolutionaries and evil reactionaries. The simplistic dichotomy between these two camps was reinforced by Mao's denial that oppressors and oppressed shared a common human nature, or that there was a 'love of humanity' which transcended class boundaries. 'In class society', he said at Yan'an, 'there is only human nature of a class character; there is no human nature above classes.' As for 'love of humanity', he decreed that 'in a class society there can only be class love' and that 'We cannot love enemies'. (Mao 1942b, 256, 276-7).

This line of argument in the Yan'an talks had devastating implications for literature and art. Writers who took it seriously were confined to narrow, revolutionary themes; they had to caricature class enemies as one-dimensional embodiments of evil; and they had to eulogize the workers and peasants as ideologically uniform repositories of revolutionary virtue. No one took it more seriously than Jiang Qing, Yao Wenyuan, Zhang Chunqiao and the other 'cultural radicals' who rose to power during the Cultural Revolution. Having achieved supremacy in the cultural sphere during the period of 'free mobilization', they used that supremacy during the Cultural Revolution's institutional phase to create a 'new' literature. They claimed that this new literature was based on Mao's 'Yan'an Talks' and on 'the combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism' which Mao had commended in 1958. For them, 'revolutionary realism' implied that what was 'real' was what agreed with current revolutionary theory, not what matched misleading, pre-theoretical observations of so-called 'real life' (cf. Mowry 1973, 59; Yang 1996b). From late 1962 until 1975, Mao was prepared to give the cultural radicals his full support. Only as death approached did he complain 'People are afraid to write articles or plays, and we have no novels and no poems.' (Leys 1978, xiv). He himself, reading and re-reading the Chinese classics, had no taste for the 'new literature' of the Cultural Revolution, which was more ideological, more purely political and more stereotyped than revolutionary writing in earlier years.

The 'new literature' was in fact very slow in coming. Fear silenced writers and publishers alike, for nearly all pre-Cultural Revolution literary works had been declared 'poisonous weeds' and most writers had been persecuted as 'monsters and demons'. From the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 until early 1972 not a single novel was published in China (Yang 1996a). Indeed, for a time few books of any sort were published except for Mao's own works (Liu 1971, 149). When new literary and cultural works began to emerge, they did so in a carefully controlled trickle, a mere fraction of China's pre-Cultural Revolution output. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, for example, the country had produced scores of feature films every year, but between 1966 and the end of 1976 only some half a dozen new feature films were approved for release (Liu 1971, 157-67, 200; Dittmer 1987, 246). Similarly, although in 1960 about 1330 official periodicals had been published in China, in 1973 there were only about 50 (Siu & Stern 1983, xlv-xlix). This was partly a result of the fact that many talented people were afraid to write. It also reflected the caution of publishers, who judged manuscripts according to strict criteria. Those laid down by a Guangdong journal were typical:

> Our publication welcomes all manuscripts which fulfil the following conditions:
>
> A. All novels, essays, articles, works of art which present in a healthy way a revolutionary content. They must: (1) exalt with deep and warm proletarian feelings the great Chairman Mao; exalt the great, glorious and infallible Chinese Communist Party; exalt the great victory of the proletarian revolutionary line of Chairman Mao; (2) following the examples of the Revolutionary Model operas, strive with zeal to create peasant and worker heroes; (3) on the theme of the struggle between the two lines, reflect the people's revolutionary struggle, which has lasted for half a century under the leadership of our Party, and, especially, the unbroken revolutionary struggle fought under the aegis of the dictatorship of the proletariat; reflect the unanimous struggle of the population of our province following the direction given by Chairman Mao, and the unfolding of that struggle in its victorious progression.
>
> B. In artistic and literary theory: we welcome texts that have a mass, revolutionary, and militant character ... [etc., etc.] [*Guangdong Wenyi*, no. 1, 1973, quoted Leys 1978, xxvii, n.5].

All fiction and literary criticism conformed rigorously to these criteria, which affected not only content but also *language.* Yang (1996a) has demonstrated this convincingly with respect to the meagre total of 120 novels published during the Cultural Revolution -- all of which appeared between February 1972 and the downfall of Jiang Qing and her allies in October 1976. Comparing a carefully matched sample of Cultural Revolution novels with their pre-Cultural Revolution counterparts, he discovered the following:

1. During the Cultural Revolution, Mao's own language dominated novels as never before. Cultural Revolution novels quoted Mao directly 11 times as often as their predecessors, and they referred to him or his Thought (often using his own words without quotation marks) 6.2 times as often.

2. Cultural Revolution novels used generalised words associated with class struggle ('the bourgeoisie', 'class enemy' and so on) 5.5 times as often as their predecessors, and they used ideological words ending with the phoneme *-zhuyi* ('-ism' as in 'socialism') 3.9 times as often. These changes matched the wider politicization of language during the Cultural Revolution and reflected the novels' more exclusive focus on class conflict and ideological struggle.

In his 'Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art' Mao had argued that 'life as reflected in works of literature and art can and ought to be on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual everyday life.' (Mao 1942b, 266). With Mao's support, Jiang Qing pushed this argument to the limit during the Cultural Revolution. It justified the creation of peasant and worker heroes who transcended the imperfections of people in everyday life - heroes who embodied the ideal of selfless revolutionaries empowered by total dedication to Mao's invincible Thought. These heroes were models for emulation, and both novels and dramatic productions had to highlight their role in accordance with Jiang Qing's doctrine of the 'three prominences' (*san tuchu*): 'among all characters, emphasise the positive personalities; among the positive, portray the heroic ones; and among the heroic, single out the central heroic figure.'

(Dittmer & Chen 1981, 55). These 'positive and heroic figures' (*zhengmian renwu*) had to be perfect - 'tall, great, and complete' (*gao da quan*). They engaged in ultimately victorious class struggle against 'villainous characters' (*fanmian renwu*), whose unredeemed wickedness reflected their class allegiance. The villains, however, were never to be the focus of attention. Jiang Qing made this clear in her doctrine of the 'three accompaniments' (*san peichen*), which prescribed that the villain's role was to highlight the virtues of the central heroic figure (cf. Dittmer & Chen 1981, 55).

These literary doctrines had a big impact. In Yang's (1996a) sample, for example, words uttered by the central heroic characters took almost up twice the proportion of text in the Cultural Revolution novels as in the pre-Cultural Revolution ones. Moreover, as Table 7.1 shows, these heroic characters, as standard bearers of the revolution, used more ideological words than anyone else:

TABLE 7.1

Ideological Words per Thousand Words Uttered by Main Types of Character

Hero, Heroine	Leading Young Woman	Representative Old, Poor Peasant	Villain
43	31.5	26.2	17.4

Source: Yang 1996a, tables 3.2.1, 3.2.2

The heroic characters, in accordance with the doctrine of the 'three prominences', were an example to the other 'good' characters - the leading young women and the old, poor peasants - in the use of ideological language as in everything else. The villains, by contrast, conformed admirably to the specification of the 'three complements', acting as a foil for the central heroic characters. They showed their bad politics by using ideological language less than anyone else. Moreover, while 'good' characters collectively mentioned Mao over a hundred times in a typical novel, the villains *never* quoted or mentioned him. They did, however, occasionally quote the 'Number One Capitalist Roader', Liu Shaoqi. In literature, as in life, language was the badge of the revolutionary and the mark of the class enemy.

7.2 Dramatic Art: the Modern Revolutionary Opera

The most influential literary texts of the Cultural Revolution were not the novels, but the scripts of Jiang Qing's model revolutionary operas (*yangbanxi*). From as early as 1966 stories and songs from the operas were broadcast on radio, and 1970 saw the beginning of an especially energetic campaign to popularize them. Indeed, in 1971/72, the winter-spring schedule of the Central People's Broadcast Station suggested that at least two hours a day be devoted to teaching the songs of the operas (Mowry 1973, 22). In workplaces and residential areas throughout most of China, millions of loudspeakers brought radio broadcasts of the ideologically charged songs to the Chinese people. Party committees in schools, workplaces and neighbourhoods encouraged people to learn the songs and sing them frequently. Since most traditional songs were banned, many people were grateful to have something new to sing. Nearly all Chinese heard the songs and most could sing some of them. Most people also saw filmed versions of the operas in picture theatres, on portable screens in halls or village squares, and in some cases on television. Finally, operatic troupes gave countless live performances in cities and sometimes even villages.

The revolutionary model operas had their cultural origins in forms of revolutionary theatre dating from the Yan'an period. Their political inspiration, though, came from Mao and Jiang Qing. As early as 1944, Mao had complained that 'the old opera (and all the old literature and art which are divorced from the people) presents the people as though they were dirt, and the stage is dominated by lords and ladies and their pampered sons and daughters.' (Quoted in Goldman 1981, 76-7). Then in 1963 he returned to the attack, complaining that 'Operas abound in feudal emperors, kings, generals, ministers, scholars, and beautiful women, but the Ministry of Culture doesn't care a bit.' He ordered the Ministry to 'conduct investigations, and put things right in real earnest.' (Quoted in Goldman 1981, 77). At the same time, he gave his full support to Jiang Qing's attempts to produce model revolutionary operas based firmly on the principles laid down in his 'Yan'an Talks on Literature and Art' (cf. Mackerras 1975, 168-9).

Jiang Qing's model revolutionary operas took the place of the traditional Beijing Opera (*jingju*), which was banned. As the new Beijing Opera, they had one big thing in common with the old: both forms of opera used stereotyped characters and plots to dramatize the confrontation between good and evil, teaching moral lessons for the benefit of the audience. The lessons which they taught, however, were very different. Whereas the traditional operas defined 'good' and 'evil' in Confucian terms, the model revolutionary operas defined it in Maoist ones. In the latter, the 'good' characters were heroes from the ranks of the workers, peasants and soldiers, and the 'bad' ones were class enemies - evil landlords, Guomindang bandits, Japanese and American imperialists, along with their henchmen, collaborators and puppets. The revolutionary operas were also less symbolic and less bound by unrealistic conventions than the traditional ones, using more natural stage settings and dressing the actors to resemble the types of people whom they played. They employed a lot of ordinary speech in addition to the singing, and they dropped the stylized sing-song which was the substitute for speech in the traditional operas. The aim was to make the operas easier to perform, to make them accessible to a wider audience, and to facilitate the transmission of revolutionary ideology.

The eight model revolutionary operas conformed perfectly to Jiang Qing's doctrines of the 'three prominences' and the 'three accompaniments'. Each opera put the spotlight, literally and figuratively, on a single figure - five heroes and three heroines in the eight operas - who embodied all the revolutionary virtues. These leading characters were physically perfect, their only loyalty was to the Party and the Revolution, and their political consciousness and revolutionary insight were an inspiration to all the other 'good' characters. The lesser 'good' characters were, at heart, true revolutionaries, but they highlighted the virtues of the main character by making occasional mistakes, letting their vigilance slacken, or being deceived by a class enemy. Above all, they lacked that perfect, Mao-inspired understanding of the nature of revolutionary struggle which ensured that the main characters always made the right decisions.

The villains were living representations of absolute evil. They were cruel, malevolent and cunning, with no hint of redeeming virtue. They were not even particularly intelligent, being driven by their base instincts to commit foul crimes which were ultimately their undoing. Their sly natures, cruelty and treachery were simply no match for the invincible intelligence of revolutionary heroes and heroines armed with Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. The villains all had evil natures stemming from their class backgrounds as landlords, Guomindang reactionaries, foreign imperialists and their lackeys. They were never capable of reform: as Dittmer has pointed out, 'in not one of these dramas does a villain succeed in making an acceptable repentance; a villain's participation in activities of redemption, such as labor or thought reform, serves only to evince his utter mendacity.' (Dittmer & Chen 1981, 102).

Most of the operas were set in the pre-liberation period when the class struggle involved warfare against 'enemies with guns'. This provided excellent material for lessons in revolutionary heroism, but it gave no guidance on how to engage in class struggle against 'enemies *without* guns'. Much more useful for that purpose was *On the Docks*, an opera of 'everyday life' dealing with the attempt to unmask a saboteur through Party-directed class struggle in 1963. It is also more useful for the purposes of this thesis, since its theme and language were intended to serve as models of class struggle and verbal behaviour during the institutional phase of the Cultural Revolution. I will therefore examine it in some detail, paying particular attention to the characteristics of its language.

On the Docks was adapted from a Huai opera which Jiang Qing attended in 1964. She liked the 'internationalism embodied by the dockers' and asked the Beijing Opera Troupe of Shanghai to re-write it into a Beijing Opera. After 'numerous struggles' it made its debut as a Beijing Opera and it was soon acclaimed as a *yangban* or 'model' (Mowry 1973, 76). Like all the model operas, it was constantly revised so that it served the current purposes of the Maoist propagandists. For example, the January 1972 script, which I use here, has added an episode in which the heroine joyously reads the communiqué of the Tenth Plenary Session of the Eighth Party Central Committee in which 'Chairman Mao told us that there are still classes and class struggles

and that we must remind ourselves of this every year, every month and every day.' (*OTD,* 16-17). This was part of a wider attempt to give more emphasis to the theme of 'class struggle in the socialist era' and to the 'heroic image of the proletarian worker armed with Mao Zedong's Thought.' (Mowry 1973, 76). The opera was also intended to persuade people that manual labour was an ennobling and vital form of revolutionary activity.

The opera develops these themes through a stunningly boring plot, totally devoid of the danger, bravery and violence which enliven the other operas. The story revolves around the attempt by the villain, Qian Shouwei, to do two things: first, to delay a shipment of seed rice to Africa, thereby sabotaging the African people's struggle against imperialism; second, to destroy China's international trading reputation by (a) hiding a broken sack of wheat contaminated with fibre-glass amongst the bags of rice and (b) including a sack of rice in a shipment of foreign-aid wheat. The heroine Fang Haizhen, however, is armed with Mao's Thought and aware that in socialist society there are 'enemies who are disguised'. Through her superior awareness of class struggle she uncovers the plot. The villainous Qian flees but is seized offstage. We are told that he was clutching a dagger and letters of recommendation from foreign imperialists and the Guomindang.

It was no accident that the plot was so boring. The opera was intended to persuade people that class struggle was relevant to their day-to-day tasks, and that maintaining the highest standards in the workplace was a matter of vital political importance. The opera made these points by applying dramatic revolutionary language to conspicuously undramatic activities. Consider, for example, the lyrics as the Party Secretary and heroine, Fang leads the dockers in song before they undertake the revolutionary task of searching for the spilled sack of wheat:

Fang: Comrades! (*Sings.*)
One spilled sack is extremely serious,
A severe test awaits us ahead.
True gold is to be tempered only in the fierce fire,
True fighters never shirk.
Determined, we'll tackle the task again,
Search the warehouse by night,
And leave no stone unturned.

Gao (*sings*):
Our arms and our shoulders are tempered steel,
They can move mountains and fill seas.
Zhao (*sings*):
Strictly we'll guard the quality of foreign-aid goods,
Find the sack first, then load the ship.
Ma (*sings*):
Let this old soldier go to the front.
Men Dockers (*chorus*):
We young should be in the foremost ranks.
Women Workers (*chorus*):
Girl workers boldly take up the challenge.
Dockers (*chorus*):
The spilled sack shall not leave this port.
Fang (*sings*):
This is a political battle,
United we'll work to untangle the trouble.
Strike hard at imperialism, revisionism and reaction,
Firmly, thoroughly, make our search.
Dockers (*chorus*):
Strike hard at imperialism, revisionism and reaction,
Firmly, thoroughly, make our search.
Strike hard at imperialism, revisionism and reaction,
Firmly, thoroughly, make our search.
Fang: Search the warehouse!
Dockers: Search the warehouse!
(*All, bold in spirit, strike a pose.*)

[*OTD* 21].

The lyrics are packed with words which, in context, have martial meanings: 'fighters', 'soldier', 'front', 'ranks', 'battle', 'strike'. Such terms were intended to bring to the search for a single sack of wheat the excitement and importance of revolutionary battles against the Guomindang or the Japanese and American imperialists, not to speak of the battles against class enemies during the 'free mobilization' phase of the Cultural Revolution. The application of martial and heroic language to everyday tasks pervades the whole opera, with one character even proclaiming that he doesn't mind carrying sacks of grain because 'To support the world revolution, our Chinese working class will do our utmost even if it means climbing mountains of knives and going through seas of fire.' (*OTD,* 4).

The lyrics of the dockers' song also suggest that the main problem is not that someone might swallow fibreglass, but that the loss of the sack has political implications: the effect on China's

reputation and the possibility that a saboteur is behind it all. Fang, always the first to see the political aspect, calls the search a 'political battle' and a blow to 'imperialism and reaction'. Elsewhere, she suggests that while swallowing fibreglass could be 'Very dangerous', 'The political effect would be worst of all'. In her eyes, the 'Search for the spilled sack is a very sharp struggle' - meaning, of course, a class struggle. Other 'good' characters say 'We'll be letting down our people and our Party / Unless we find that sack' and 'The working class has entrusted us with this task. We won't let them down. We will not disappoint Chairman Mao!' (*OTD*, 14, 26, 30).

In the opera, the dockers' work is always described in political terms. Fang says that every sack of rice and wheat 'will play a part in the African people's struggle against imperialism', and Gao uses the usual grand metaphors to describe the dockers' struggle to build revolutionary links with the oppressed peoples of the world:

> *Neither mountains nor seas can block*
> *Our revolutionary fervour.*
> *We send our sincere friendship*
> *To all parts of the globe.*
> [*OTD*, 2, 4].

When the dockers 'Show their strength, do a good job', they 'win glory for our land'; and when they discover that the spilled sack is being carried on a lighter to a waiting freighter Gao sings heroically:

> *Our country's honour is on that lighter,*
> *We can't let the enemy's treachery succeed.*
> *The revolutionary friendship that lighter carries*
> *Must never be besmirched by the spilled sack.*
> *Though the thunder crashes in a deluge of rain,*
> *Though the tide rises high in the deep of the night,*
> *Though the waves are wild and the current swift,*
> *I shall brave them all and set out in pursuit.*
> *Neither mountains of knives nor seas of flames*
> *Can stop a communist from doing his duty.*
> [*OTD*, 30-1].

Then Gao shows his determination to protect his country's revolutionary gift of seed rice by removing his jacket and covering a sack of rice threatened by the pouring rain. A selfless deed complements the bold words, which are replete with images of

crashing thunder, torrential rain, wild waves, swift currents and, of course, the inevitable 'mountains of knives' and 'seas of flames'. This was the standard language of heroic metaphor, used here to make the point that perfection in the workplace is as important to the class struggle as heroism on the field of battle.

The application of heroic language to the mundane work of the docks evoked correct revolutionary implicatures only because the audience already possessed assumptions which associated that language with episodes of heroic struggle. The audience could be expected to derive the required implicatures as follows:

(1) Existing assumption: communists engaged in class struggle against 'enemies *with* guns' must be brave and determined enough to climb 'mountains of knives' and go through 'seas of fire'.

(2) Assumption introduced by opera: communists engaged in class struggle against 'enemies *without* guns' must be brave and determined enough to climb 'mountains of knives' and go through 'seas of fire'.

(3) Implicature: the struggle against 'enemies *without* guns' requires as much courage and determination as the struggle against 'enemies *with* guns'.

The implicature was especially easy to derive because the opera constantly reminded the audience of the existing assumption by using similar language to recall the violent struggles of the past:

> Fang: *The words of our forbears are written in blood:*
> *"Avenge us. Seize the ownership of the docks."*
> *When the P.L.A. bugles blared the call to charge,*
> *Our heroes fearlessly drove out the wolves ....*
>
> *Dockers' work has significance,*
> *Why do you say it's demeaning?*
> *The blood of martyrs dyes our docks ....*
> [*OTD*, 36].

In using language which linked the work of the docks with the romantic struggles of the violent past the opera ennobled class struggles against hidden enemies within socialist society and against imperialists in distant lands. Moreover, as audiences made sense of the dialogue, they were required constantly to use assumptions linked to the Maoist world view. This made them aware that those who had written the opera, with the full approval of the Maoist leadership, expected everyone in the audience to possess and accept those assumptions. Many people found it difficult to resist these expectations. In this way, the process of interpretation tended to have persuasive effects through what Sperber and Wilson (1995, 115-17) have called 'retroactive strengthening'.

The language of the opera also evoked the dichotomy between the World of Light and the World of Darkness (cf. Dittmer 1987 and ch. 5 above). It thereby conditioned the audience by associating the revolutionary cause with the positive imagery of the World of Light and by associating class enemies with the negative imagery of the World of Darkness. Consider the lyrics which Fang sings as she reads the Communiqué of the Tenth Plenary Session of the Eight Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party:

> *Reading the Communiqué stirs me deeply.*
> *Outside a rainbow arches across rain-washed sky.*
> *A great future has our land, pretty as a picture.*
> *How can we allow monsters here to wreak havoc?*
> *No matter how quickly the devil changes his wiles,*
> *We are prepared and well on our guard.*
> [*OTD*, 36].

Immediately before this scene, the audience was treated to dark clouds, thunder, lightning and torrential rain. Now, as Fang draws enlightenment from the Communiqué, clouds and rain are inappropriate. So the weather suddenly clears and the stage instructions have Fang study the Communiqué against a backdrop of a 'very blue' sky washed clean by the rain, a few flimsy white clouds, and a 'fresh rainbow'. The lyrics of her song contrast this idyllic scene with the threat from 'monsters' and 'the devil' - the inhabitants of the World of Darkness who are, of course, associated with words like 'havoc' and 'wiles'. Almost immediately, inspired by the Communiqué as the source of light, she suspects that 'An acute and

complex class struggle may lie behind' the incident of the spilled sack, with Qian as the most likely culprit.

The villainous, black class Qian briefly leads astray a young red-class docker, Han. When Han sees the error of his ways, he naturally comes to see the conflict as one between a monster from the World of Darkness, on the one hand, and the Party as the source of light, on the other:

> *I've been infected by bourgeois ideas,*
> *How wrong of me to look down on dockers' work.*
> *I should not have let down my elders' hopes,*
> *Nor lightly believed that black-hearted wolf.*
> *Now I've brought trouble to us all,*
> *I can hardly be forgiven, hardly be forgiven!*
> *Thanks to the help of the Party,*
> *I've come to see light.*
> [*OTD*, 37].

Han is quickly forgiven and regains his comrades' trust, for his red class background makes him a natural inhabitant of the World of Light. Qian, on the other hand, was suspected in the first instance largely because, as a former accountant who had helped the Americans, the Japanese and the Guomindang to oppress the workers, he belonged to the black categories. Fang, armed with insight into the nature of class struggle after reading the Communiqué, knows that Qian is 'an enemy who is well disguised, mouthing sweet words', that he 'pays lip service to socialism but in his heart he does not forget his foreign masters.' (*OTD*, 35). In all the model revolutionary operas, members of the black categories were presumptive inhabitants of the World of Darkness - always the first suspects. And, as everyone knew, the operas were scripts which people were expected to live by. Their message of class hatred was backed by the Party; it was reinforced by countless other scripts during the institutional phase of the Cultural Revolution; and it suited the interests of members of other classes who were glad to see suspicion diverted from themselves. Not surprisingly, the black categories were always the first suspects in real life. In the China of Mao, Jiang Qing and the cultural radicals, life was made to imitate art.

In *On the Docks*, as in all the model revolutionary operas, the characters conformed to the formula prescribed by Jiang Qing's doctrines of the 'three prominences' and the 'three accommodations'. Fang is distinguished from everyone else by her awareness of the class struggle in socialist society, by her reliance on Mao's Thought, and by her consequent success in unmasking the class enemy. More politically advanced than everyone else, popular and a natural leader, she sets a perfect example to otherwise 'good' characters who have let their vigilance slacken, allowing the class enemy to tamper with the rice and the wheat. She also plays a leading part in the salvation of young Han, who was almost seduced from his red class roots by the evil, black class Qian. Her starring role is reflected in the fact that she is given the lion's share of the script.

TABLE 7.2

Words Spoken or Sung by Characters

Character	Words	
	No.	% of Total
Fang Haizhen (heroine)	3219	41.7
Gao Zhiyang	1049	13.6
Ma Hongliang	927	12.0
Han Xiaoqiang	831	10.8
Zhao Zhenshan	531	6.9
Minor characters	308	4.0
Chorus	188	2.4
Qian Shouwei (villain)	664	8.6
TOTAL	7717	100.0

Fang speaks or sings fully 41.7 percent of the words in the script. The second largest roles are allotted to Gao, team leader of the dockers' brigade, and Ma, a retired docker well equipped to give lessons in class hatred because he remembers the cruel oppression before the Communist Party liberated the workers. These two characters are exceeded only by Fang in their revolutionary virtue. Somewhat fewer words are allotted to Han, the young red class docker who is almost lured away by Qian, and to Zhao, an old communist who has let his revolutionary vigilance slacken. By the end of the opera, Fang has restored both Han and Zhao to revolutionary virtue.

Qian, as the villain, occupies precisely the role prescribed by the 'three accommodations'. The plot revolves around his act of sabotage, but he is allotted relatively few words and, as a character, he is simply a foil to Fang - malevolent, sly, but no match for the heroine. He is not even allowed to impress the audience with his voice. As Table 6.3 shows, Qian is the only person on the stage who sings not a single word.

TABLE 7.3

Amount Sung by Characters & Chorus

Character	Lines Sung	
	No.	% of Total
Fang Haizhen (heroine)	140	43.6
All other 'Good' characters	168	52.3
Chorus	13	4.0
Qian Shouwei (villain)	0	0.0
TOTAL	321	100.0

During the Cultural Revolution, as never before, language was a badge of revolutionary virtue. A true revolutionary was supposed to imitate Lin Biao and the official press by quoting Mao, by referring frequently to him or his Thought, and by using the correct political terminology at every opportunity. We should therefore expect to find that the number of references to Mao and quotations from his works is a reliable index of revolutionary virtue. And so it is, as Table 6.4 demonstrates.

TABLE 7.4

Mao-references and Mao-quotes

Character	Mentions of Mao		Quotes from Mao	
	No.	%	No.	%
Fang Haizhen (heroine)	8	53	3	75
Other 'Good' characters	4	27	0	0
Chorus/workers in unison	3	20	1	25
Qian Shouwei	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	15	100	4	100

Fang displays her superior political consciousness by being the only individual character to quote Mao, and she does so three times. The only other Mao-quote is by the chorus, which is led by Fang (*OTD*, 5). Fang also mentions Mao eight times, twice as often as all the other individual characters combined, and she is the only character to quote a Party document. The workers collectively or in chorus, who have the role of expressing the revolutionary solidarity of the dockers under Fang's wise leadership, mention Mao three times as they shout 'Long live chairman Mao!' and express their commitment to his Thought in the final scene. Qian, as the villain, neither mentions Mao nor quotes him. In this respect, the opera conforms precisely to the pattern of the novels written during the Cultural Revolution.

The distribution of ideological terms is in most respects predictable. As expected, Fang stands out from all the other individual characters. Terms like 'class struggle', 'class enemy', 'compradors', 'revisionism', 'communism', 'internationalism', 'revolutionary', 'anti-imperialist' and, of course, 'Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought', trip lightly from her tongue. Table 7.5 shows that she uses ideological terms at over twice the rate of other 'good' individual characters.

TABLE 7.5

Frequency of Ideological Terms

Character	Ideological Terms	
	No.	No. per 1000 Words
Fang Haizhen (heroine)	86	26.7
Gao Zhiyang	12	11.4
Ma Hongliang	6	6.5
Han Xiaoqiang	16	19.3
Zhao Zhenshan	6	11.3
Minor characters	3	9.7
Chorus	14	74.5
Qian Shouwei (villain)	6	9.0
All 'good' characters exc. Fang	43	11.8
ALL CHARACTERS & CHORUS	149	19.3

The table, however, has two figures which are at first sight surprising. First, the chorus uses ideological terms far more frequently than Fang. This results from the fact that the chorus has no ordinary dialogue,

but functions as an echo and a megaphone for the correct political sentiments expressed by major characters, especially Fang. So when Fang sings 'Strike hard at imperialism, revisionism and reaction', the chorus chimes in and repeats the line twice, thereby adding six ideological words to its total (*OTD*, 21, quoted above). The chorus does not surpass Fang's level of ideological consciousness, but reproduces and broadcasts it.

Second, the villainous Qian uses ideological terms only a little less frequently than the average of all the 'good' individual characters excluding Fang. He actually outscores old Ma, the retired docker who helps Fang to save young Han from Qian's clutches. This result emphasises the limitations of mere word counts, divorced from any context of interpretation, as a measure of ideological consciousness. In fact, Qian's use of ideological terms is almost invariably counter-revolutionary in intent, as when he says venemously, 'Fang Haizhen, the sight of Communists like you makes me see blood', using the ideological term 'Communists' as a term of counter-revolutionary abuse (*OTD*, 23). Similarly, when he addresses the dockers using the ideological 'Comrades, comrades!', he is making a hypocritical attempt to persuade the dockers to trust him (OTD, 20). By contrast, old Ma's low percentage of terms which are *semantically* ideological takes no account of the fact that he uses an exceptional number of terms which are *pragmatically* ideological. Consider the following passage, in which he tries to bring young Han back to the path of revolutionary righteousness as he shows him relics of the 'bitter past':

> *Who snarled and bared their claws like wolves?*
> *Who worked like horses and toiled like oxen?*
> *Who set up the steep and narrow 'high plank'?*
> *Who trudged on endlessly in sheer exhaustion?*
> *Compare before liberation and after,*
> *Look at the carrying pole, 'high plank' and tattered clothes,*
> *The foreman's whip and manacles ....*
> *Look carefully, at each and every one.*
> [*OTD*, 32].

The only word in this passage which is semantically ideological is 'liberation', a term which all people in China link semantically with the Communist Party's victory in 1949. The whole passage, however, is *pragmatically* ideological, since almost every noun and adjective

has a pragmatic reference to a quintessentially ideological phenomenon - class oppression. So old Ma's language is appropriate to his revolutionary message and to his staunch, proletarian status. Like everything else in the revolutionary operas, it is carefully calculated to teach a political lesson - in this case a lesson in 'class education'.

The message of the operas is paradoxical: it enjoins both outstanding initiative and total conformity. The paradox is most acute in the case of the main characters, who are at once dashing architects of revolutionary victories and robots programmed by Maoist scripts - scripts not only in the literal sense, but also in the figurative, academic sense of 'schemas which provide models for speech and action'. Fang, for example, is intelligent and full of natural authority, but she owes her success entirely to her script-driven fidelity to Mao Zedong's Thought. Her goal, she says, is one which she learned from 'steel-strong heroes tempered in a blaze':

> *From them we must learn*
> *To dedicate ourselves to world revolution,*
> *To be a never-rusting cog*
> *In the great revolutionary machine.*
> *This is the grand ideal, brilliant youth,*
> *Of every revolutionary.*
> [*OTD,* 38, emphasis added].

The ideal was to live in total conformity to the Maoist scripts and to be empowered by them. It was an ideal which could be attained only on paper and in theatrical performance. In part, this was because the Maoist scripts sometimes offered unworkable advice - they were a flawed guide to reality. But a further problem was that while the scripts could be given a single, 'correct' reading by the main character in a work of fiction, their pragmatic referents were less determinate in real life. A script-writer can ensure that a fictional hero always chooses the correct interpretive assumptions, but there is no way of ensuring that real life heroes will do the same. So people who sought to demonstrate the script-inspired initiative of Fang and other leading characters ran the risk of interpreting the scripts 'wrongly'. When that happened, interpretations and actions intended to be 'revolutionary' were denounced by the Maoist hierarchy as

'counterrevolutionary'. Even the Red Guards discovered that to their cost.

The Maoist leaders hoped that by making people learn scripts they could control their behaviour, and the model revolutionary operas, whose songs most Chinese learned by heart, were intended as a rich source of such scripts. Having observed and learned the scripts, people were supposed to act them out. Life was supposed to imitate art. The scripts alone, however, were insufficient, because their implications varied with the context of interpretation. As a result, the institutional phase of the Cultural Revolution saw not only mass learning of Maoist scripts, both literal and figurative, but also the re-building of a coercive apparatus to guide interpretive assumptions, monitor interpretation and correct or crush those who adopted deviant readings. Even then, we shall see, it was impossible to achieve full uniformity of thought, in part because the context of interpretation remained to some extent intractable.

CHAPTER 8

EDUCATING REVOLUTIONARIES: THE CASE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

8.1 The Cultural Revolution and School Curricula

The Cultural Revolution had a devastating impact on Chinese education. From mid-1966 to late 1968 the schools and universities virtually ceased to function except as revolutionary headquarters. Nearly all their staff were subjected to harrowing criticism, large numbers were beaten and many were locked up for months or years in improvised campus gaols popularly called *niu peng* ('cow sheds') after the *niugui sheshen* ('cow ghosts and snake spirits' alias 'monsters and demons') imprisoned there. When the schools re-opened, under the control of 'workers-peasants-soldiers propaganda teams', their teaching was at first confined largely to supervised study of Mao's works and Maoist newspaper editorials, together with talks by old workers or peasants who 'recalled the bitter past' which they had experienced before Mao and the Communist Party saved them. The function of schooling was now to ensure that students 'became participants in the great struggle to transform the old world and create the new' (*Beijing Review*, no. 1, 4 Jan. 1974).

In 1969 and 1970, however, new curricula and textbooks at last appeared, together with enough teachers (many released from the 'cow pens' or returned from 're-education' under the peasants) to provide at least some formal classes. The new curricula and textbooks bore the unmistakable stamp of the Cultural Revolution. In Canton, for example, the textbook used to teach Chinese literature and language contained mostly quotations from Mao, together with newspaper editorials on the latest political campaign and occasional readings from the new 'model revolutionary plays' sponsored by Jiang Qing (Unger 1982, 176). Sciences, criticised as 'academic' and irrelevant to revolutionary concerns, were dropped as distinct disciplines in favour of a course on 'Industrial-Agricultural-Military Studies' which mentioned scientific principles only in relation to production techniques and never

explained them coherently. Even the arithmetic textbook 'contained mainly Mao quotes.' (Unger 1982, 158, 175). So in both content and linguistic form, the new textbooks were subordinated to Maoist discourse.

In this context, it is at first sight surprising that the study of English survived the Cultural Revolution. It was even less use than physics and chemistry to the workers and peasants; no one, except a few people in high places, was going to be able to use it to talk to foreigners or to read English newspapers or books; it was the main language of the imperialists, and its diplomatic uses were limited because China's foreign relations had almost ceased to exist; and it was not even going to be of much use to scientists and technicians, hamstrung by attacks on expertise, the policy of technological self-reliance and the cult of the untutored worker-peasant inventor. The whole logic of the Cultural Revolution implied that mass instruction in the English language was not only unnecessary, but perhaps anti-revolutionary. That, indeed, is precisely the view which prevailed in the heartland of the Cultural Revolution, Shanghai, where English was eliminated from the curriculum until 1971 when China began to emerge from diplomatic isolation (Unger 1982, 283, n.6). Shanghai's stand, almost certainly, reflected the influence there of Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan and Wang Hongwen, who were leaders of the Central Cultural Revolution Group, Jiang Qing's firmest allies, and close to Mao himself. All from Shanghai, they dominated the city during the Cultural Revolution and enforced extreme revolutionary purity.

In China as a whole, however, the teaching of English underwent what looked like a boom. The reason was that Mao had said, when talking to some Red Guards in 1968, 'It's good to know English. I studied foreign languages late in life. I suffered. One has to learn foreign languages when one is young.... One cannot study geology without a foreign language. It's good to learn English. Foreign language study should be started in primary school.' (Unger 1982, 283 n.5). Only self-confident revolutionaries close to Mao, who did not have to rely on newspaper reports of his chance remarks in order to know how far they could go, could afford to take any chances. So while Zhang, Yao and Wang for a time excluded English from Shanghai, it was taught as soon as possible in almost all secondary schools elsewhere.

However, it had to be taught in a way consistent with the discourse of the Cultural Revolution. This resulted in remarkable pedagogical innovations, all designed to ensure that centralized control of the word applied even to the teaching of the English language. To clarify the nature of these innovations, I will briefly outline the aims and pedagogy of foreign language instruction in China before the Cultural Revolution. I will then examine 22 English Language textbooks published between 1969 and 1976 to show how the very different aims of foreign language instruction during the Cultural Revolution led to the adoption of new pedagogical principles which affected the teaching of vocabulary, cultural background and even grammar.

8.2 Foreign Language Teaching: Aims and Pedagogy

China has a long tradition of foreign language education. The first foreign language school opened in the thirteenth century, and when China suffered defeats at the hands of imperialist powers in the nineteenth century the need for foreign languages became urgent. Western languages, especially English, were seen as the key to modernization, and both the imperial government and the republican administrations which followed it after 1912 founded many language schools. Thousands of students went abroad, including the future Communist leaders Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping. Their influence ensured that when the Communists gained power in 1949 they, too, promoted foreign language education. Russian soon displaced English as the most widely taught language because the Soviet Union was China's main source of diplomatic, military, economic and technological support. Then, with the Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960s, the demand for Russian speakers declined and English regained parity (Fu 1986, 1-83).

Until the Cultural Revolution, the purpose of teaching foreign languages was always to facilitate communication with foreigners for diplomatic or commercial purposes, or to gain access to useful aspects of their science, technology or culture. This aim had implications for pedagogy, reflected in the approach to grammar, vocabulary and cultural context in China in the early 1960s:

Grammar. Where possible, simple grammatical principles were explained before complicated ones, frequently used rules before rarely used ones, and regular forms before irregular ones. These pedagogical principles are, of course, common to all the main approaches to language instruction in the West. As Cook (1991, 25-6) points out, even functionally based language courses which are ostensibly organized around topics of everyday importance ('Asking permission', 'Going shopping') employ this order of presentation - dealing with the present tense before the past tense, the past tense before the past perfect tense, and so on.

Vocabulary. Under the seven year plan initiated by Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai in 1964, high school language students were to acquire a vocabulary of 3,000 words, enabling them to read simple foreign books and newspapers and to conduct uncomplicated conversations. To facilitate this aim, the words selected were 'basic' ones essential for communicating with native speakers (Fu 1986, 147). This approach was like that of Western course designers who compile vocabulary lists with the help of research on how frequently native speakers use particular words, and who also take into account criteria such as a word's coverage - its ability to define other words, to take their place, and to combine with them to make new words (Nation 1990). Relative to the aim of communication with foreigners, this is elementary good pedagogy.

Cultural context. Chinese language students were required to study the present situation, history, geography, culture and customs of the country whose language they were acquiring. Their textbooks also had to include fables, short stories, myths and extracts from original works by native speakers (Tang n.d. [1983?], 43). Again, relative to the goal of communication, this was pedagogically sound, for communicative competence in a foreign language requires understanding of the culturally specific contextual assumptions which guide reference assignment and determine the social significance of utterances (Saville Troike 1996; Cramsch 1993; Cook 1991, 54-7; Widdowson 1990; and on context and reference assignment in general, Sperber and Wilson 1995).

But what if enabling students to talk with foreigners or understand their books is not the only aim of language instruction, or even the main one? Under these circumstances, quite different pedagogical principles may be in order. In the West, for example, theorists like Curran (1967) have seen language classes in part as a means of fostering student self-expression and personal development. This has led them to recommend radical student-centred approaches in which the teacher becomes merely a facilitator who gives no direct instruction and corrects neither grammar nor pronunciation (Cook 1991, 148-50).

In China during the Cultural Revolution the traditional goal of communicating with foreigners was even more thoroughly eclipsed. Instead, school students were subjected to courses of language instruction whose imperatives were largely political. The remainder of this chapter explores the effects of these imperatives on English language teaching in China, taking as its major source textbooks used in high school language classes. The books were all published in important centres and formed a model for those published elsewhere, so my conclusions about their contents, grammatical pedagogy and vocabulary can be extended to China as a whole.

8.3 The Textbooks: (1) Maoist Discourse

The Maoist cadres who controlled education were not going to expose language students to a discourse which reflected the assumptions of Western society. Amongst those assumptions was the belief that there was a sphere of 'private life', separated from politics, which could be analysed in non-political terms. For the Maoists, everything was political, and that 'fact' had to be reflected in the contents of the textbooks. Table I summarizes the contents of the 25 lessons in a textbook which became a model for introductory texts in many parts of China.

TABLE 8.1

Contents of *English*. vol. 1, Beijing 1969

Contents of lesson	Number	Percent
Political	25	100
Moral Ed. & Ch. Trad.[1]	0	0
Science	0	0
Foreign Stories	0	0
General	0	0
TOTAL	25	100

The lessons, it can be seen, were entirely political. They consisted mainly of English translations of political slogans, quotations from Chairman Mao, Lin Biao's inscriptions, and revolutionary songs. Their main theme was Mao worship. The first thirteen lesson, in fact, consisted of nine lessons praising Mao and four quoting him. In lesson six, for example, the only thing they learned was 'Chairman Mao is the red sun in our hearts'; in lesson seven, their only task was to study Mao's statement that 'Our Party is a great Party, a glorious Party, a correct Party'; and in lesson ten, they confined their attention to Lin Biao's inscription:

> Long live the great teacher, great supreme commander and great helmsman Chairman Mao! A long life to him! A long, long life to him!

The early textbooks, especially, were dominated by the scripts of Mao worship, but these were always complemented by scripts expressing other themes of Maoist discourse. One of the most common themes was 'the bitter past of the labouring people', which was always contrasted with the happiness and prosperity of the present (*English*, vol. 11, Shanghai 1974). It had several standard variants, but a particularly useful one stressed the hunger which had stalked the land before Liberation:

[1]'Moral Education and Chinese Tradition'.

I am fifteen.
And Grandpa is sixty-three ...
I have bread and rice for meals.
But he had only husks and weeds ...
Why are things so different?
Because the times are different.
Thanks to the Party and Chairman Mao, the former slaves are the masters of the country now. [*English*, vol. 8, Shanghai 1973].

Students were made to say this, of course, partly because most of them had been hungry during the Great Leap Forward and were still very poor. They had to be convinced that they were actually well off - or at least better off than their grandparents.

Another theme of the discourse was class struggle, which dominated lessons as never before. Its form can be exemplified from the textbooks themselves:

> It is half past two in the afternoon. The pupils of Class One are sitting in the classroom. They are having a lesson in class struggle. On the blackboard there is a quotation from Chairman Mao, 'never forget classes and class struggle'. An old worker is telling the pupils about his bitter past and his happy life today. From time to time the pupils shout, 'Never forget class bitterness! Always remember class hatred! Long live the Communist Party of China!' [*English*, vol. 1, Henan 1973].

Recitation of the scripts of class hatred was intended to perpetuate hostility to surviving members of the old exploiting classes, who played a useful role as targets of competitive displays of revolutionary fervour. To justify continued struggle against them, the scripts had to claim that they could never be trusted. One textbook, for example, told the story of 'The Farmhand and the Snake'. It tells how a farmhand took pity on a snake dying of cold. He picked it up and warmed it in his bosom. When the snake revived it gave the farmhand a deadly bite. The story ends like this:

> Chairman Mao teaches us: 'Who are our enemies? Who are our friends? This is a question of first importance for the revolution. Class enemies are just like snakes. We should never expect them to change their nature. We should always be on our guard against them and carry the revolution through to the end. [*English*, vol. 10, Shanghai 1973].

Similar stories warning students against the cunning and treachery of class enemies were a feature of many volumes (e.g., *English*, vol. 5, Henan 1972; *English*, vol. 8, Henan 1974; *English*, vol. 6, Henan 1973; *English*, vol. 6, Tianjin 1973).

A third prominent theme of the discourse was reverence for workers, soldiers and especially the poor and lower-middle peasants:

> The working class is the leading class. [*English*, vol. 1, Beijing 1969].
>
> Workers, peasants and soldiers are our good teachers. [*English*, vol. 1, Henan 1975].
>
> Two weeks' labour in the countryside has really done me a lot of good.... I worked with the poor and lower-middle peasants and learned a lot from them. [*English*, vol. 6, Henan 1973].
>
> The poor and lower-middle peasants care for and help us. They teach us how to cut wheat. They teach us how to bind it. They are our good teachers. We learn a lot from them. [*English*, vol. 3, Henan 1972].
>
> [My sister] is a barefoot doctor.... She serves the poor and lower-middle peasants heart and soul. In her letters she says: "The countryside is a good classroom. The poor and lower-middle peasants are my good teachers. I will serve them all my life." [*English*, vol. 2, Beijing 1972].
>
> We are educated young people. We receive re-education in the Red Flag People's Commune.... The poor and lower-middle peasants are our good teachers. They help us study Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. They often give us lessons in class struggle and the struggle for production.... We are determined to make revolution in the countryside all our lives. [*English*, vol. 8, Henan 1974].

Making students recite these standardised scripts served two main purposes. It subordinated them to the workers and the poor and lower-middle peasants, lest they show any tendency to develop into an educated élite; and it forced them to praise what most of them dreaded - exile to the countryside, where they would spend the rest of their days working hard under the tutelage of the poor and lower-middle peasants. In other words, the discourse of the textbooks reinforced the

social engineering of the 'New Born Things' of the Cultural Revolution which we discussed in chapter 6.

A fourth theme of the discourse was summed up by the Maoist slogan 'Serve the people!' One textbook included an abridged version of Mao's essay which bore that title, and nearly all textbooks had stories which exemplified its theme. Characters in the books not only burned with desire to sacrifice themselves for the people in general, but actively searched for ways to sacrifice themselves for individuals, especially old people from good class backgrounds. Invariably, they were inspired by Chairman Mao who taught them: 'All people in the revolutionary ranks must care for each other, must love and help each other.' (*English*, vol. 5, Henan 1972).

After Lin Biao died in the wake of an alleged attempt at a coup in 1971, people saw that Mao's best friend, hand-picked as his successor, was now officially described as a 'bourgeois careerist, conspirator, double-dealer, renegade and traitor'. However, the Party's ultra-left guiding principles remained largely intact, and those who sought to preserve the 'gains' of the Cultural Revolution retained great influence in the party's leadership. So revolutionary momentum remained strong and most educational innovations were retained. This continuity was reflected in the contents of the textbooks, such as those published in Henan in 1972:

TABLE 8.2

Contents of *English*, vols 2, 3, 5, Henan 1972

Contents of lesson	Number	Percent
Political	23	88.46
Moral Ed. & Ch. Trad.	1	3.85
Science	0	0.00
Foreign stories	1	3.85
General	1	3.85
TOTAL	26	100.00

The table shows that after Lin Biao's death the percentage of lessons categorized as mainly 'political' remained nearly as high as in 1969. If anything, the table understates the pervasiveness of political content, for throughout the Cultural Revolution nearly all the lessons in other

categories had political content too. For example, in a 1974 textbook a lesson on knowledge of the earth, which we would classify under the heading 'General', had a conclusion which attacked the discourse of race and expressed the discourse of class and revolution:

A. ... What are the five races on the earth?

B: They are the red, the yellow, the brown, the white and the black races. But it is nonsense to divide mankind according to the colour of the skin.

A: How would you divide mankind, then?

B: They may be divided into two classes, the exploiters and the exploited.

C: You are right. They may also be divided into the revolutionary and the reactionary. [*English*, vol. 8, Henan 1974].

The main difference in the content of textbooks after the death of Lin Biao was that they were purged of Lin's own Mao-worshipping slogans and inscriptions, so prominent in earlier years. In their place were lessons which reflected the vicious campaigns to discredit Lin himself. Their technique was simply to direct at Lin the standard discourse used to condemn enemies - the very discourse which he himself had once used against people like Liu Shaoqi. One textbook, for example, has a former coal miner say:

> Before liberation this coal-mine was owned by the Japanese aggressors. I was a coal-miner here. How I suffered in those miserable days! .... But Lin Biao attempted to restore capitalism and sell out our country to the socialist-imperialists. He wanted to make us suffer under the imperialists' rule once again. We will never allow such a thing to happen. We will further strengthen the dictatorship of the proletariat and smash any plot for capitalist restoration. [*English*, vol. 2, Tianjin 1974].

The discourse did not change, but the textbooks always kept in step with the latest political line simply by attaching different referents to the terms of praise and condemnation. It was possible to predict the contents of the books if one knew the current political situation, and one could understand the current situation simply by reading the books.

Textbooks whose over-riding aim was to teach correct political thought could not afford to waste time putting the English language in its cultural context. Nor could they afford to contaminate the students' minds by introducing them to stories by Western writers, for even stories which were totally apolitical were by that very fact politically incorrect - manifestations of the bourgeois doctrine that literature could be separated from politics. So the only 'foreigners' in the books were stereotyped imperialists or stereotyped clones of revolutionary Chinese. Consider, for example, the characterization of a foreigner in the story 'Eager to get a Chairman Mao Badge':

> The black sailor comes to China for the first time ... He loves Chairman Mao. Chairman Mao is the ever-red sun in his heart. He is eager to get a Chairman Mao badge. 'How happy I am!' Tears in his eyes, he shouts: 'Long live Chairman Mao! A long, long life to him!' [*English*, vol. 1, Beijing 1969].

The sailor simply expressed the politically correct sentiments of a model Mao-worshipper. This served the purpose of propagandists who wanted to encourage young Chinese to believe that Mao was an inspiration to all the oppressed peoples of the world. Children who believed their textbook, though, would have been nonplussed had they ever met a real worker from an English speaking country. And if they had tried to engage in conversation, they would almost inevitably have made statements which were misinterpreted, or which gave offence, caused embarrassment or sounded unintentionally comical. They simply had too many false assumptions about the values and background knowledge of the people whose language they were trying to learn. In short, the contents of the textbooks supplied the students with the standard assumptions required for the correct interpretation of political messages in China. They supplied none of the very different interpretive assumptions which were a pre-requisite of effective communication with foreigners.

8.4 The Textbooks: (2) Vocabulary

People studying a new language cannot use it effectively as medium of communication unless they know the most commonly used words. We can ascertain whether the textbooks provided a suitable grounding in the English language's 'essential nucleus' by comparing their vocabulary with the first and second word lists compiled by Paul Nation (Nation 1983). The first list consists of the thousand words (apart from purely structural words like prepositions) which it is most necessary for students to master if they are to use English as a system of communication. These words occur very frequently, they are used in many different contexts, their inflections and syntax are relatively regular, and they are extremely useful in defining and explaining other words. The basic vocabulary in any well designed course of instruction in English will consist mainly of these words. The second list consists of another thousand words which, while less essential, figure prominently in the vocabulary of native speakers. Students who can recognise these words, and the thousand somewhat more advanced words in Nation's third list, will be able to read a good deal of everyday English material without frequent use of a dictionary.

The first of our textbooks, published in Beijing in 1969, is an introductory text for students who had never learnt English before. It has a total vocabulary of only 179 words which are not purely structural. According to the pedagogical principles used in most textbooks, a large majority of these words should come from the thousand basic words in Nation's first list. Table 8.3 shows that only 33.5 percent of words are in the first list, and only another 2.8 percent in the second list. Most of the words, in fact, are not part of the everyday vocabulary of native speakers of English.

TABLE 8.3

Frequency of Occurrence of Basic Vocabulary in Introductory Textbook, *English*, vol. 1, Beijing 1969

Total		In Nation's First List		In Nation's Second List	
No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
179	100	60	33.5	5	2.8

If only 36.5 percent of the 179 non-structural words in this introductory textbook are amongst the 2000 most basic words in the English language, what principles governed their selection? They were not chosen according to linguistically oriented pedagogical principles, but according to political ones. They were the words required to translate the slogans of the Cultural Revolution. Students could say 'Chairman Mao leads us in the socialist revolution and socialist construction, and in the struggle against imperialism and revisionism', but few native speakers of English had more than the haziest idea of what this meant. And the students still had not learned how to say 'hello', 'good-bye', or ask for a cup of tea.

The influence of politics on vocabulary was particularly obvious in 1969, but it remained strong throughout the Cultural Revolution. As Table 8.4 shows, just over 40 percent of the non-structural words in two middle level school textbooks published in Henan in 1972 and 1973 occur in Nation's list of the thousand most basic words, and only six or seven percent can be found can be found amongst the next thousand.

TABLE 8.4

Frequency of Occurrence of Basic Vocabulary in Intermediate Level School Textbooks, 1972 and 1973

Details of Textbook	Total Vocabulary		In Nation's First List		In Nation's Second List	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
English, vol. 5 Henan 1972	124	100	51	41	7	6
English, vol. 4 Henan 1973	129	100	56	43	9	7

Many of the words in the textbooks used the phonetics of the English language to code the content of the Chinese political vocabulary. As a result, native speakers of the English language, unfamiliar with Chinese political terminology, would frequently not have known what the textbooks were talking about. Few, for example,

would have known that the term 'socialist-imperialists' referred to the leaders of the Soviet Union; that the term 'traitors', when used with reference to people's activities after 1949, referred exclusively to people of 'good' class origins who had betrayed their origins by opposing the revolutionary line; or that the term 'class' referred to a multitude of 'good' and 'bad' groups which often had nothing to do with classes in any Western sense, Marxist or non-Marxist (cf. chapter 2). Other words in the textbooks which had different meanings for Chinese students than for native speakers included 'reactionary', 'the people', 'landlord', 'model', 'secretary', 'instructor', 'renegade', 'bad element', 'scab', 'intellectual', 'advanced' and 'correct'. 'Correct', for example, did not mean, as it did to native speakers of English in the 1960s or 1970s, 'true' or 'proper', but 'politically correct' in the sense of 'conforming to the current revolutionary line'. No attempt was made to teach Chinese students the meanings which these terms had in the English speaking world. So even on narrowly political topics they would have found it difficult to get their message across. In the words of one language teacher, 'The English in the textbooks was not the English of any English-speaking country.' (Tang n.d. [1983?], 44).

Because so many non-structural words in the textbooks were rarely used outside the specialized formulae which dominated Chinese political discourse, students had no chance to learn that solid core of constantly recurring words which must be understood if language is to be used as a medium of general communication. It is through understanding such words that we are able to construct a context which sheds light on the meaning of words which are new to us. Students who lack such words will frequently find that they can understand individual phrases, but that the meaning of a whole text remains obscure. Moreover, because most of the words taught in the texts were very narrow in their application and had little defining power, the students were not able to build on them to ascertain the meaning of other words. So in relation to the goal of teaching English as a means of communication with native speakers, the vocabulary in the textbooks was a disaster. In relation to the rival goal of political indoctrination, however, the vocabulary which the students learned was entirely appropriate. It was the language of revolutionary discourse, and the students used it to say all the right revolutionary things.

8.5 The Textbooks: (3) Grammar

In the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, the politicized pedagogy of the textbooks extended to the teaching of grammar. Most language courses, we have seen, start with grammar which is simple, frequently used and regular in form. They introduce points which are difficult, rare or irregular only at more advanced levels. The pedagogy of textbooks early in the Cultural Revolution, however, was based on quite different principles. The first English sentence which students met in the 1969 Beijing textbook, for example, was 'Long live Chairman Mao!' This is a conventional expression with irregular grammar, and using purely linguistic criteria it would not have been considered for inclusion at the outset of an introductory text. The criteria employed, however, were not linguistic but political. The most important sentence in the English language, as in any language, was 'Long live Chairman Mao!', so it had to come first.

If students were to recite many of the slogans of the Cultural Revolution, they had to be introduced to the imperative mood. So the second sentence in the textbook was an imperative: 'Let's wish our great leader Chairman Mao a long, long life!' This laid the groundwork for a later lessons in which students were expected to say things like 'Down with U.S. imperialism!' and 'Down with the renegade, traitor, and scab, Liu Shaoqi!'

Having learned to recite slogans in the imperative mood, students were introduced to the indicative mood and the present tense. They were then able to recite other slogans such as 'Workers, peasants and soldiers love Chairman Mao best.' In this sentence, however, they met their first adverb, and it was not a simple adverb but the superlative 'best'. No attempt was made to explain the use of adverbs in English, or to situate the superlative form 'best' in the context of the comparative 'better' or the simple 'well'. From a linguistic point of view, this was poor pedagogy, but from a political point of view it was natural. The language of Chinese politics was a language of extremity based around unbridgeable dichotomies between the most extreme good and the most appalling evil, so adjectives and adverbs frequently took the superlative form (see ch. 5 above). And in talking about

Chairman Mao, the temptation to use superlatives like 'best' was especially great, for his virtues and the love of his faithful followers were 'boundless'.

At this stage of the Cultural Revolution, it was necessary not only to participate in the cult of Mao-worship but to acknowledge the authority of the cult's high-priest, party Vice-Chairman Lin Biao. This involved the recitation of Lin Biao's inscriptions, which sometimes featured advanced grammatical forms. Students who knew almost no English were required to say:

> Sailing the seas depends on the helmsman,
> Making revolution depends on Mao Tse-tung's thought.
> [*English*, vol. 1, Beijing 1969].

Here they met the gerundive use of 'sailing' and 'making'. Since Chinese verbs are not inflected, and there are no gerunds, these English words would have puzzled students who thought about them. Fortunately, the book does not add to the confusion by attempting to explain gerunds. Its concern was not the grammar, but the political necessity of worshipping Mao in the words of Lin Biao.

Mastery of the tenses of the English language presents particular problems to Chinese students, for the verbs in their own language have no tense. It is very important, from a linguistic point of view, to introduce the tenses in a clear and systematic way. Left to themselves, Chinese teachers of English would have dealt first with the present and past tenses, leaving the rather confusing present perfect and past perfect till later. In the 1969 textbook, however, the second tense which students met was the present perfect. This was not because the textbook's authors were experimenting, as language experts, with 'way paving' or some other linguistically motivated pedagogical technique, but because it was politically imperative to teach students to sing 'The East Is Red' early in their studies:

> The East is red, the sun rises,
> China <u>has brought forth</u> a Mao Zedong.
> [Emphasis added].

It would be hard to think of a more confusing way of introducing the present perfect tense, for 'bring/brought' is an irregular verb, and

students had not yet been introduced to verbs like 'start/started' which follow the standard form. Moreover, 'to bring forth' is a rather uncommon expression, unlikely to be used except when singing 'The East Is Red'. And finally, this lapse into the present perfect tense was accompanied by no attempt to explain or illustrate the principles which govern its use.

Later in the Cultural Revolution, however, linguistic criteria became far more important in determining the order in which grammatical points were presented. Students still had to learn how to say 'Long live Chairman Mao!' at the beginning of their studies, and they were still given an early introduction to the imperative so that they could recite the more inflammatory slogans. Thereafter, however, the textbooks reverted to a traditional order of presentation based on linguistic principles, not political ones. By 1972, for example, the textbooks in Beijing, Henan and elsewhere were drilling students thoroughly in the present tense, then moving systematically through the other tenses before presenting the present perfect and past perfect tenses last.

Why, when the textbooks' vocabulary lists remained politicized throughout the Cultural Revolution, did the textbooks so quickly discard most political criteria in teaching grammar? The crucial difference is that while the presentation of revolutionary content was impossible without a specialized political vocabulary, it could easily be reconciled with orthodox teaching of grammar. Even introductory textbooks restricted to the present tense had ample scope for Mao worship:

> Chairman Mao!
> You are the red sun in our hearts!
> We are sunflowers.
> Sunflowers always face the red sun.
> We think of you day and night.
> We wish you a long, long life.
> [*English*, vol. 2, Beijing 1972].

If the textbooks so often ignored linguistically oriented pedagogical principles in 1969, it was because Mao worship and disdain for experts were more extreme than in the later stages of the Cultural Revolution. Revolutionary discourse proclaimed that Mao Zedong's Thought was, in

Lin Biao's words, 'an inexhaustible source of strength and a spiritual atom bomb of infinite power' (Urban 1971, 44). Mao's Thought, rather than mere technical expertise, was said to be the secret of success in all fields. When Chinese scientists successfully observed a solar eclipse, it was because they had been 're-educated by workers, peasants and soldiers' and were 'Armed with the invincible thought of Mao Tse-tung'; and when fishermen made big catches, it was because 'They put revolution in command of fishing and set up thousands of Mao Tse-tung thought study classes on their fishing vessels ... repudiat[ing] the revisionist fallacies peddled by the renegade, hidden traitor and scab Liu Shaoqi, such as "material incentives", "skills first" and "profits in command".' (*New China News Agency*, 23 Jan., 11 June 1969, in Urban 1971, 46-48). In this context, it was difficult to press the claims of linguistically oriented pedagogy, for that could bring accusations of putting 'skills first' from revolutionary ideologues.

By 1972, however, some of the more irrational excesses of the Mao cult had passed. Lin Biao, the leading exponent of Mao worship, was disgraced and dead, while Premier Zhou Enlai was battling Jiang Qing and the more extreme Maoists, re-building the bureaucracy and searching for practical solutions to China's problems. Moreover, China was re-emerging in world politics. The People's Republic replaced Taiwan in the United Nations in 1971; the American President, Richard Nixon, visited China in 1972; and 31 countries established diplomatic relations with China in those two years. Under these circumstances, Mao agreed with Zhou Enlai and Vice-Premier Li Xiannian to re-emphasise the teaching of foreign languages. At the same time, Mao's allies in promoting the Cultural Revolution, the extreme radical around Jiang Qing, interpreted the slogan 'politics in command' to mean that the textbooks should be dominated by translations of Mao's quotations and by political material reflecting the current Party line (Fu 1986, 84-5). The result was a compromise, weighted in the radicals' favour. The textbooks retained their revolutionary content, but that content was now graded carefully to ensure that it was largely consistent with the proper teaching of grammar. So students received a thorough grounding in grammatical principles while being taught a vocabulary selected according to political criteria, not linguistic ones.

8.6 Language Teaching, Discourse and World View

From the perspective which dominated during the Cultural Revolution, it mattered little that the teaching of foreign languages in China did not equip students to communicate with foreigners. What mattered was that young people should saw the world through the lens of Mao Zedong's Thought. Indeed, it was to ensure faithfulness to his message and destroy those whom he suspected of subverting it that Mao launched the Cultural Revolution. His primary targets were bureaucrats, teachers and intellectuals who emphasised technical proficiency rather than ideological purity. Their destruction required a discourse which damned those who were 'white and expert' rather than 'revolutionary and red'. In terms of that discourse, traditional language teaching pedagogy was grossly deficient since it put technical proficiency before revolutionary politics. This way of thinking carried all before it until 1971-2, and through Jiang Qing and the radicals it exercised a profound although more selective influence thereafter.

The subordination of English language instruction to Maoist political discourse ensured that learning a foreign language was not going to open up a window onto another world, or give students access to other patterns of thought. Prescribed terms such as 'reactionary', 'capitalist roader', 'revisionist, 'traitor' and 'scab' categorized and judged the world in particular ways, as did 'revolutionary', 'socialist', and 'proletarian'. The insistence that they, and they alone, constituted the language of social, political, moral and aesthetic appraisal severely limited what could be said. And, insofar as constant use made these terms more accessible than alternatives, they influenced what could most easily be thought. Because descriptions of Western societies, for example, used only the technical vocabulary of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, nothing positive could be said about them, except that their workers loved Chairman Mao. The result was a one-dimensional picture which reduced Western societies to sources of class exploitation and imperialist aggression which were ripe for revolution. Anyone who wanted to add other dimensions to the picture had to make the effort to break away, inwardly, from the enforced language of public discourse. This was not impossible, but in Mao's China few had any incentive to try.

Because the language of the textbooks was based on standard Maoist formulae, it had all the persuasive effects associated with such formulae which we have discussed in earlier chapters. Moreover, we might suggest that translating the content of revolutionary formulae into the linguistic form of a foreign language had two additional advantages. First, it involved intensive mental processing which fixed their content even more firmly in students' minds. Second, translating Maoist formulae into a foreign language helped to universalize their message, implying that it was a matter of prime importance, not just for the Chinese people, but for the whole world. This point was made explicit in several textbooks. One textbook, for example, quoted a fictitious Soviet sailor:

> Comrade Mao Tse-tung is the Lenin of our era. He is the ever-red sun in the hearts of the people of the world. He is the great leader of the world's revolutionary people. He leads us in the struggle against imperialism and revisionism.... We vow to follow him and make revolution forever. [*English*, vol. 1, Beijing 1969].

Such passages told the students that Maoist discourse, irrespective of the linguistic code through which it was expressed, was the universal language of the revolutionary masses.

During the Cultural Revolution 'real' English was kept out of the classroom, confined to a tiny élite whose services were required as diplomats and interpreters. Instead the English which most students were taught was oriented towards translations of Maoist scripts and Chinese political terms. These were the scripts and the terms required for the correct analysis of the world. They would one day be understood and accepted in the West, as capitalism crumbled. In the meantime, China had a mission to disseminate Maoist discourse by translations and propaganda, and to safeguard the revolutionary purity of her own population. In the discourse of the Cultural Revolution, China was a model for the rest of the world, but the world could teach China nothing.

IV

ASSESSMENT

CHAPTER 9

MAO'S EXPERIMENT IN LINGUISTIC ENGINEERING: SUCCESS AND FAILURE

By the time Mao died in 1976, the Chinese people had been subjected to 27 years of linguistic engineering. For all but two of those years (mid-1966 to mid-1968) a centralized hierarchy had monitored not only language but also interpretation, in an attempt to ensure that 'correct' words were matched by 'correct' thought. At the end of this period, what had been achieved? Was Maoist language matched by Maoist thought? We are now in a position to reflect, systematically, on the evidence - to balance the successes of Mao's great experiment against its failures.

9.1 Success

Linguistic engineering in China had some undoubted successes. The most obvious was, or should have been, apparent to anyone who visited China and listened to people talk: the fact that everyone knew how to use 'correct' language to say 'correct' things in all public contexts. The following model conversation, published by the New China News Agency in 1966, was no more 'correct' than many actual conversations with foreigners:

> A Japanese youth asked: "Have you ever thought of travelling abroad? Where would you like to go?"
>
> A Tientsin middle school Red Guard answered: "I have not thought about it; we do not think of sightseeing, but if I had the chance I would like to go to Vietnam and fight at the side of the fraternal Vietnamese people to wipe out the U.S. invading gangsters."
>
> When the Japanese friends asked about their aim in life, a Red Guard from the Peking Aeronautical Engineering Institute said: "We are young people in the era of Mao Tse-tung. Chairman Mao has taught us 'The world is yours as well as ours, but in the last analysis it is yours. You young people, full of vigour and vitality, are in the bloom of life, like the sun at eight or nine in the morning. Our hope is placed on you....' The fact that two-thirds of the oppressed people in the world are not liberated comes to mind." [Quoted in Liu 1971, 181].

Often, such words reflected people's true feelings. Even when they did not they served a purpose, for the discrepancy between rebellious thoughts and conformist words was a lesson in the realities of power. Believers and unbelievers alike adopted forms of speech which legitimated Mao's imperial sway.

Throughout this thesis, we have stressed that verbal conformity is linked to powerful mechanisms of persuasion. Verbal conformity made even Mao's secret enemies model correct attitudes; it made worship of Mao and his Word a condition of acceptance by most reference groups; it linked positive words with Mao and his policies and negative words with everything which he opposed; it ensured that 'correct' views gained credibility through repetition and the validity effect; it led people to say Maoist things which changed their attitudes through dissonance or self-reference; it made people say things which consolidated Maoist assumptions in their audience through retroactive strengthening; and it ensured the activation of concepts and schemas which made the Maoist world view more accessible and therefore more 'natural' than its rivals.

These mechanisms of persuasion worked best when there were no countervailing influences, and this meant that they were especially effective amongst those who had not suffered from Mao's rule but who benefited from it. In the early 1950s, we have seen, peasants who stood to benefit from land reform overwhelmingly adopted revolutionary attitudes after cadres persuaded them to call for the dispossession, punishment and even execution of the landlords. The new, revolutionary ideology not only justified the peasants' violent and revolutionary words, reducing dissonance, but it suited their interests. It was only when the revolutionary ideology began to damage the peasants' interests that they became selectively resistant to persuasion through the manipulation of discourse.

The peasants who profited most from revolutionary discourse over the whole course of Mao's rule were the poor and lower-middle peasants. By inverting the status hierarchy, the discourse made them the most prestigious group in the rural class structure. They were the class upon which the cadres were always told to 'rely', the class from

which educated youth 'sent down' to the countryside were told to 'learn', the 'Zhuge Liangs' whose wisdom the Party was supposed to tap. Moreover, the discourse of their class superiority conferred advantages. It justified giving them preference in recruitment into the Party and positions of responsibility; it justified giving them further education when their academic qualifications were poor; it justified giving them more work points, and hence higher incomes, than members of the 'black categories'; it meant that they could be, politically, just a little 'incorrect', for they were less likely than others to be accused of lack of revolutionary consciousness; and it meant that they were less likely to be blamed when something went wrong, for the discourse made dispossessed 'landlords and rich peasants' the scapegoats for almost everything. They may mostly have rejected the discourse of the Party's superior wisdom and the discourse of collectivism, which damaged their interests, but there is every reason to believe that they accepted the discourse of their own superiority and the unrepentant wickedness of the black categories (cf. Unger 1984; Chan, Madsen & Unger 1984).

The discourse of collectivism may have hurt the peasants, but it had great appeal to others. It conferred immense power on the cadres, who dominated the structures of collective power and directed and manipulated collective activities. So most of the cadres, even in rural areas, retained faith in the discourse long after it should have been discredited by its failures. The urban working class, too, benefited from the discourse, which justified their 'iron rice bowl' of permanent employment, as well as the security of health care, pensions, and education for their children. They often developed a culture of loafing on the job. While this made a mockery of the discourse of sacrifice in the cause of socialist construction, it wedded the workers to the collectivist discourse which made their 'feather-bedded' employment possible. When it became possible in the 1980s for them to leave state employment and seek their fortunes on the market, few took the opportunity. They saw talk of the closure of money-losing state industries as a threat, preferring to take it easy at their collective work then 'moonlight' at other jobs after hours.

During the 'free mobilization' phase of the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1968, Mao was at first very successful in a form of linguistic engineering which involved manipulating the meaning of the

discourse by changing its context of interpretation. The tactic worked so long as he could still find sufficiently powerful groups who were prepared to accept each suggested switch in the context. At first, it was easy. Mao used his immense prestige and an obedient Party to organize the switches which brought down 'Three Family Village', Peng Zhen, the Beijing Party Committee and the central Propaganda Department. He was then able to get the middle-class dominated 'Rebel' Red Guards and the less privileged workers to accept the switch which condemned the Party as a whole as anti-Revolutionary. But when, after January 1967, Mao switched the context yet again, turning the discourse against 'Rebels' who hoped for a more consultative and democratic form of government, they deflected or ignored his message. Thereafter, he lost control of the context of interpretation, and with it control of the Cultural Revolution. He had to abandon the attempt to manipulate events through discourse and re-impose a coercive apparatus to monitor and correct interpretation.

Although language eventually proved ineffective at controlling the *course* of 'free mobilization', it maintained its power to motivate and intimidate. Red Guards and workers fought each other with a common stock of linguistic symbols which inspired loyalty to comrades, created a sense of righteous conviction, and empowered those who wielded them with hopes of ultimate victory. At the same time, the symbols used to vilify and curse opponents increased hostility towards them and, when interpreted literally, were an important contributor to violence. So language increased the savagery of the Cultural Revolution, even when its referents were so disputed that it ceased to influence the *patterns* of mobilization.

When centralized control was restored after 1968, revolutionary discourse was particularly persuasive amongst those who did well out of the institutionalized phase of the Cultural Revolution. Such people included the host of new cadres whom Jiang Qing and her allies recruited and promoted in the hope of building a power base within the Party. These 'helicopter cadres', as they were called, knew who their patrons were, and they were not disposed to look critically at 'correct' responses or at simplistic Maoist formulae. Self-interest created no barriers to the message of the revolutionary language which they spoke and enforced, and they were easily persuaded by it.

Similarly, the New Born Things of the Cultural Revolution, which were implemented in this period, gave many members of the red classes, young and old, a vested interest in accepting a world view linked to Maoist formulae. It was the red classes who benefited from the emphasis on class background and political virtue at the expense of expertise and ability when it came to education, job assignment and promotions. Reducing competition from more able members of the 'bad' classes and the middle classes had always been an objective of many red-class youths, because hopes of upward mobility created fierce competition for a restricted number of places. Revolutionary cadres' children, especially, relished the implications of a Maoist discourse which justified the creation of an almost caste-like social pyramid with themselves at the top (cf. Unger 1982, 134, 172, 178). In the case of talentless but ambitious members of the red classes, self-interest and linguistic manipulation worked in harmony. They found many things to like in the revolutionary discourse which consolidated their class superiority and praised the New Born Things.

The ignorance of youth was a great help to language-based persuasion. By 1976, most young people knew non-Maoist world views almost entirely through Maoist discourse, which caricatured and condemned capitalism, liberalism, revisionism, feudalism, Confucianism and so on. At best, young people were given a few non-Maoist texts to read for the purposes of criticism, like those distributed during the anti-Confucius campaign, but these texts were never enough to allow them to develop an understanding independent of Maoist categories and judgments. The young were vulnerable in other ways, too. When they learned and recited stories about revolutionary heroes, model workers and model soldiers, they were less likely than their parents to know that these models were too good to be true; they had not lived long enough to know how frequently the Maoist message had contradicted itself over the years; and they had not yet accumulated a wealth of bitter experience to make them appreciate the gulf between discourse and reality. It is not surprising that early in the Cultural Revolution students were the most ardent Mao-worshippers - the well-indoctrinated storm troopers whom Mao used to attack the intellectuals and teach the Communist Party a lesson. Nor is it surprising that, between 1968 and 1976, centrally directed indoctrination and

institutionalised Mao-worship had produced another generation of young Chinese who revered him. If young people had fears about their own futures as a result of his policies, if they were increasingly cynical about aspects of the socialist system, they tended to level the blame at others, whose faults they could observe and whose images were not sanctified by the formulae of worship. As so often in China's past, the emperor might have been surrounded by 'bad advisers', but he himself escaped criticism.

Adults were less vulnerable to linguistic engineering than children, but on many topics they, too, lacked sources of information independent of the discourse. For example, adults rarely had alternative sources of information on life in the West, so when they were told that 'the workers in capitalist countries are haunted by the threat of starvation', most of them believed exactly that. And, when asked about the situation of Western workers, they repeated what they had been told, actively reproducing the discourse. Similarly, when city dwellers heard peasants 'speak bitterness' against pre-Liberation landlords, they were in no position to say 'these peasants are lying or exaggerating.' Only a generalized scepticism about the discourse of bitterness could impede acceptance of the message, and that was hard to sustain when all the peasants, in the presence of outsiders whom they did not trust, stuck to the script.

Lack of opposing beliefs not only aids acceptance of the message, but it facilitates higher order conditioning. Most people had no real knowledge of the phenomena designated by the terms 'capitalism', 'imperialism' and 'revisionism', so negative conditioning was easily accomplished by ensuring that the discourse linked these terms with words like 'starvation', 'exploitation' and 'oppression'. The term 'socialism', by contrast, nearly always brought a favourable response, because it was repeatedly linked with positive terms and described an ideal form of society which, in its full sense, was known only through discourse. I can still remember my surprise when I came to New Zealand in the mid-1980's and for the first time in my life heard people use the word 'socialist' as a term of abuse. Within China, most of those who were disappointed at the turn which the Cultural Revolution had taken still thought that socialism *as such* was a good thing. Some of them hankered after a democratic socialism on the model of the Paris

Commune, while others studied the Marxist classics in an attempt to find a socialist alternative to the Maoism which existed in China. For most peasants, perhaps, the socialism which they wanted was still the 'socialism' which had won their hearts at the time of the land reform of the early 1950s: peace, prosperity and a good piece of land which they could call their own (cf. Friedmann, Pickowicz & Selden 1991). People had many different 'socialisms', all of them good. Even those who escaped to Hong Kong because they had no future in Mao's China frequently retained socialist ideals, of a sort, for years after their arrival (Chan 1985, 193-94, 198; Nathan 1986, 212; Bennett & Montaperto 1971, 234-6; Dittmer 1987, 105-7; Zhai 1992, 148).

The effect of linguistic engineering on the concepts and schemas with which people analysed the political world was also clear. On the basis of interviews with Chinese who escaped or migrated from China in the 1970s, Dittmer has concluded that 'The language of cultural radicalism became generalized to the whole public sector so that everyone who participated in that sector moved within its categories.... [T]he belief in the abstract verities professed in the [Maoist] polemics seems to have survived, at least until the death of Mao Zedong and the arrest of his most ardent supporters allowed the language itself to be reconsidered.' (Dittmer 1987, 107). For example, people continued to believe that class was fundamental to society and that struggle (*douzheng*) was both inexorable and essential to progress. Typically, Dittmer's respondents said 'If you want progress, you have to have struggle' or 'Without struggles, contradictions cannot be resolved. With a large territory, a large population, and complicated problems, it is impossible to have no struggles.' (Dittmer 1987, 106-7).

Finally, belief in Mao himself remained widespread, even as resentment at the policies implemented in his name grew. In part, this was because Mao's own words could be interpreted in different ways, depending on the interpretive assumptions of those who heard or read them. This made it possible for people to retain their belief in Mao's wisdom by blaming, say, Jiang Qing or the Party for misinterpreting his words. It also made it possible for Mao to blame his subordinates for misunderstanding his instructions whenever their attempts to implement his apparent wishes resulted in disaster. So Mao was protected from blame by the difficulty of knowing exactly what he

meant. He was also protected by the fact that few people ever met him and that even fewer knew him personally. He was a remote figure, his vices largely unpublicized, his personal responsibility for China's ills known only to a few. He existed for most people only through his writings, and through images conjured up by media propaganda and the formulae of Mao-worship. Few people knew enough about him to resist the effects of conditioning produced by the constant juxtaposition of the title 'Chairman Mao' with positive terms like 'Great Leader', 'Great Helmsman', 'the red, red sun in our hearts', and so on. As a result, even those who had come to hate the Cultural Revolution and many features of Communist Party rule were often slow to blame Mao. Jung Chang, for example, detested the Cultural Revolution as early as 1966 and became progressively more alienated from the Chinese political system, but it was not until 1974 that she blamed Mao himself, rather than Lin Biao or Jiang Qing. Even then, she connected Mao with China's ills only because through a friend she read the first foreign magazine which she had ever seen - a copy of *Newsweek* which linked Mao to Jiang Qing by describing her as his 'eyes, ears, and voice.' This hint from a rival discourse struck her 'like a flash of lightning', crystallizing her thoughts and letting her see that 'It was Mao who had been behind all the destruction and suffering.' (Chang 1992, 631). The 'blind spot' which the discourse of Mao worship had created in her understanding of the world been at last been removed.

9.2 Failure: (1) Language versus Experience

It is likely that it was in the early 1950s that the discourse of Maoism came closest to representing what most of the Chinese people really thought. Millions of landlords and 'counterrevolutionaries' had suffered terribly, capitalists had been pillaged and humiliated, but these were small minorities. In the cities, most people were relieved that the Japanese had been defeated, that the terminally corrupt Guomindang had fled, that peace had been restored and that mainland China had at last been re-unified. Then, when the Korean War seemed to pose yet another imperialist threat, Chinese armies drove the American-led United Nations forces out of North Korea. At long last, China stood tall in the world, victorious over the foreign imperialists who had subjected her to humiliations ever since the Opium War of

1839-42. It was a time of hope, and many intellectuals returned from overseas to help in the creation of the New China. There were many elements of the discourse of Maoism, in the form which it took in the early 1950s, which matched this mood: its nationalism, reflected in the great campaign to 'Resist America - Aid Korea'; its purity and opposition to corruption, reflected in the Three-Anti and Five-Anti campaigns; its emphasis on the great task of national reconstruction; the promise that there would be a long period of 'new democracy' before the establishment of socialism; and the insistence, in the language of the 'mass line' and the 'united front', that the Party must always seek to unite with at least 90 percent of the people and refrain from forcing policies on an unwilling majority.

Over 80 percent of Chinese people, however, were peasants. We saw in chapter 2 that most of them at first accepted revolutionary discourse, in part because it justified the condemnations of the landlords which the Party manipulated them into making, and in part because it justified redistribution of the landlords' possessions amongst individual peasant families. From 1955, however, the discourse changed as the Party justified forcing the peasants to surrender their land to collectives controlled by the cadres. The new discourse of collectivism was unpopular with many peasants from the start, and when it helped to cause the disaster of the Great Leap Forward it was largely discredited. When the Party relaxed its policies in 1961-62, many peasants reverted to private production as far as they were able, only to lose most of their gains when Mao used the Socialist Education Movement of 1963-65 to force them back to collective farming. In 1967, the destruction of Party authority during the 'free mobilization' phase of the Cultural Revolution saw another surge in private production, but this was suppressed after 1968 when the Maoists reimposed centralized control (Zhou 1996, 48-53).

From 1955, the peasants were compelled to mouth the slogans of collectivist Maoism, but they were not persuaded by a discourse whose disadvantages they knew from their own experience. In particular, they knew that the Party, not the peasants, controlled the land; that the Party was ignorant of farming, but forced the peasants to obey instructions which were often misguided; and that the Party extorted as much production as it could from the peasants, leaving the

overwhelming majority in poverty. The peasants were undoubtedly the group which suffered most as a result of collectivist discourse, and they were almost certainly the group most strongly opposed to it.

If the peasants were by far the largest aggrieved group, many others joined them, for Mao's policies of class struggle and social upheaval continually claimed new victims. Like the peasants, they seldom blamed Mao himself, but they directed silent hostility at those around him whom they held responsible for their woes. They included, according to official Party estimates in the 1980s , over 20 million people who suffered because they were labelled 'landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, or bad elements' in the early 1950s; more than half a million people who were branded as 'Rightists' in 1957; several million peasants and other rural residents who were declared 'anti-socialist elements' during the popular backlash against collective farming and Party incompetence in the early 1960s; three million cadres who had been involved in 'unjust and erroneous cases' during the Cultural Revolution; and more than 300,000 who had been wrongly convicted, mostly as counterrevolutionaries, during the Cultural Revolution. According to Hu Yaobang, who headed the investigation into their cases, the total number affected was a hundred million people including the primary victims' families - who were of course persecuted as well (Nathan 1986, 7).

The catalogue of victims above makes no explicit mention of the large number - perhaps 400,000, perhaps 1,000,000, or perhaps more - actually killed during the Cultural Revolution, and of the bitterness of the families and friends whom they left behind (cf. ch. 5, above). Nor does it explicitly mention the countless millions of others who were persecuted, beaten, tortured or locked in 'cow pens' during the Cultural Revolution without ever being 'convicted' of anything. But the list of those who were scarred and at least partly alienated does not stop there. They included the red-class Red Guards, who had always thought of themselves as natural 'revolutionary successors', who felt betrayed when the Maoist leadership turned on them and their families in late 1966 as it mobilized the predominantly middle class 'Rebel' Red Guards and revolutionary workers against the Party. One former red-class Red Guard recalled:

> It was a head-on blow.... I was changed from a leader of the revolution to its target overnight! I never dreamed this could happen to me....
>
> Suddenly my faith in Mao and the party centre fell away. I saw all the flaws of the Cultural Revolution: there were no revisionists or capitalist roaders in the school, the working group didn't push a capitalist reactionary line, the home raids were nonsense, and fighting the Sons of Bitches [the 'bad' classes] was totally insane. If anyone had made a mistake, it was Mao and the party by starting this damnable revolution in the first place. [Zhai 1992, 119-20].

Then, as we saw in chapter 3, both the 'Rebels' and the revolutionary workers were betrayed once they had done what the Maoists wanted - virtually destroyed the Party which Mao no longer trusted. They knew that they had been 'used', and their political naiveté vanished. Their concern was now to protect themselves by manipulating Maoist phrases and symbols, and by defeating their opponents militarily (cf. Ling 1972).

Disillusionment was followed by desocialization. Red Guards and former Red Guards often began to indulge in precisely the 'bourgeois habits' which they had tried so strenuously to eradicate during the Cultural Revolution. Zhou Enlai complained early in 1968 that one élite Red Guard unit had lost two-thirds of its members and that 'The bad ones turn to lovemaking, playing poker, leading a dissipated life, having the ideas of the United Action Committee, writing reactionary handbills, etc.' (Quoted in Liu 1976, 184). Western novels and the Chinese classics became prized, if carefully concealed, possessions, and a black market in books developed with the highest prices paid for 'yellow books' with romantic themes and references to sex. The black market dealt in many other things, too, including Mao badges; and with the breakdown of Party control gangs and lineage groups emerged to fill the void. (Chang 1992, 488-96; Liu 1976, 184-5; Liu 1986, 330-3; Ling 1972; Liang & Shapiro 1983, 149-52, 191). The reimposition of centralized control after 1968 suppressed these activities and forced the younger students back to school, although it took some time to overcome widespread truancy and disorder amongst children who for two years had run free (Unger 1982, 149-52, 158-9, 186-7). Nothing, however, could restore the faith of the Cultural Revolution generation in those whom they blamed for their betrayal - Lin Biao, Jiang Qing and

her faction, and occasionally even Mao himself. Instead, the restoration of control increased their bitterness, for most of the former Red Guards were exiled to the countryside to undergo re-education through labour at the hands of the peasants.

Finally, if the New Born Things of the Cultural Revolution won the loyalty of those who benefited from them, they aroused resentment amongst those whom they disadvantaged: the teachers, academics and other intellectuals who now took their orders from sometimes illiterate workers in the Workers' Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Teams; the millions of urban high school graduates who were sent to the countryside to become, in effect, peasants; the brilliant students of non-red background who were denied further education because political criteria gave preference to 'worker-peasant-soldier students' who were sometimes scarcely literate; and the cadres, doctors and intellectuals who suffered in rural labour camps under the supervision of PLA Propaganda Teams. All of these had experiences which cast doubt on the philosophy which informed at least some of the revolutionary formulae which they, like everyone else, recited. They had great difficulty in accepting all the claims of a discourse which praised policies which ruined their dreams and, quite deliberately, destroyed their self-esteem.

The appeal of Maoist ideology had always been its promise that with a few years of self-sacrifice and ideological rectitude the Chinese people would create a prosperous and fully socialist society, then move rapidly to the utopia of communism. 'Three years of struggle, a thousand years of communist happiness', Mao had told them (Dittmer 1987, 41). However, the failure of the Great Leap Forward buried all hope of a rapid transition, and the trauma of 'free mobilization' of the revolutionary masses between 1966 and 1968 left most Chinese with a bad case of revolutionary burnout. They wanted to feel safe, they wanted an end to hardship, and they wanted peace and order. Instead, they got continuing revolution: a new social order which systematically assaulted pre-Cultural Revolution élites, and an endless succession of campaigns under the banner of class struggle. At the end of it all, the Chinese people were still no closer to the rich and happy society which they had been promised. Indeed, according to Mao, neither they nor their children would gain any benefit. He had abandoned the goal of

material betterment, saying that it impeded the transition to socialism, and he had concluded that 'nothing is certain except struggle.... it is quite possible the struggle will last for two or three hundred years.' (Quoted in Dittmer 1987, 41, 134). This new message of endless revolutionary turmoil to support an uncertain and distant utopian vision was almost too much for most people to bear. Maoism was no longer an ideology of hope, but a growing and sometimes intolerable burden. People kept on mouthing the revolutionary formulae, but in many cases their revolutionary commitment was ebbing. They were beginning to lose the faith (cf. Ci 1994).

When people thought that their own revolutionary words sometimes had a hollow ring, they became increasingly suspicious of revolutionary rhetoric from the mouths of others. This accentuated a perennial problem in Mao's China: the inherent instability of a 'virtuocracy' in which, in theory and often in practice, people received promotion, power and honour for saying and doing all the right things. Everyone knew that people whose words and behaviour were morally unacceptable ('incorrect') would not be allowed to succeed, and that the most politically virtuous tended to receive the biggest rewards. However, the problem with virtuocracies, as Susan Shirk (1984) has argued so well, is that they destroy the reign of virtue and create suspicion of the apparently virtuous by producing opportunism, sycophancy, patronage, avoidance of activists, and privatization. When people are conspicuous for saying all the right revolutionary things, it is often assumed that they are just trying to advance themselves; when they say what their superiors want to hear, it is taken for granted that they are merely attempting to please or flatter potential patrons; and when they obey the rules of the virtuocracy by making more than the usual innocuous criticisms of erring colleagues, their words are interpreted as self-serving declarations that political principles are more important than friendship. As a result, the language of revolutionary self-sacrifice is widely regarded as a manifestation of self-serving ambition; activists who use that language to criticize others cease to be models, and are feared and avoided lest they betray their friends to prove their virtue; and true friends, who put personal loyalty above revolutionary self-advancement, become especially valued (Shirk 1984).

China was not, of course, a pure virtuocracy. In some periods, merit was an important criterion of advancement, although it was heavily discounted during the Cultural Revolution. Class background, too, played a big role, partly because it suited Mao to keep class tensions alive, and partly because the Party regarded class background as a simpler and more reliable test of political virtue than revolutionary language or political activism. China came closest to being a pure virtuocracy during the Cultural Revolution, when the words and deeds of intellectuals, cadres and all 'persons in authority following the capitalist road' were subjected to scrutiny against the mirror of Mao's Thought. Indeed, all sections of the population were forced, more than ever before, to protect themselves by verbal displays of revolutionary conformity, as well as practical ones. Practical displays had some credibility because they demanded self-sacrifice, but words were cheap and everyone knew it. So while everyone understood, and respected, a normal level of conformity to the norms of linguistic virtue, those who excelled often became, not models, but objects of scepticism. Living in a society where virtue was rewarded made most people suspicious of virtue - especially linguistic virtue. So Mao's linguistic virtuocracy undermined respect for the very norms which it attempted to inculcate. People understood not only the idealistic words, but the selfishness which so often motivated them. The realities of life in a virtuocracy promoted cynicism about language and undermined the effectiveness of linguistic engineering.

If personal experience caused most people to doubt some of the claims of revolutionary discourse, comparatively few people rejected that discourse wholesale while Mao was still alive. Often, they disliked particular leaders, particular policies, or particular aspects of the system which they were forced to praise, but they liked other leaders, other policies, other aspects of the system. Their acceptance and rejection of the discourse was selective. Moreover, a lot of people who suffered at the hands of the system believed that it should be reformed and run better, rather than abandoned. The most obvious example of continued belief in the basic soundness of the system, despite an intimate acquaintance with its faults, is the veteran cadres who were victimized during successive Party rectifications and the Cultural Revolution. Most of them kept the socialist faith, and even when in disgrace they usually remained confident that their punishment was all

a 'mistake' - that Mao or the Party would remedy the situation and redress the wrongs which they had suffered. Cadres were, of course, more highly motivated than most people to believe that the system was fundamentally sound, but there were many others who wanted only system-preserving reform and who clung on to as much of the discourse as they could. This was often because they not only suffered under the system but benefited from it, whether as members of the red classes who enjoyed their status, or as workers who valued their 'iron rice bowl', or as members of the middle classes who, through talent and political virtue, had overcome the disadvantage of 'non-red' origins. At times, however, something deeper than self-interest lay behind their desire to internalize as much of the discourse as they could, rejecting only those themes which damaged their interests or were discredited by their experience. The attraction of the discourse lay precisely in the fact that it embodied a world view which related past, present and future - a philosophy which seemed to explain much of what happened in the world, and which gave a purpose to many of life's struggles. In the case of a good many Chinese, Maoism was the only coherent world-view which they knew. They were reluctant to give it up completely until they found an alternative world view, or had learned to find meaning without one.

9.3 Failure: (2) Language versus Itself

If language is to mould thought, then it helps if the message which it delivers is consistent. During the Cultural Revolution, however, the tactical requirements of the power struggle led to contradictions so blatant that few people could ignore them. We saw in chapter 3 how Mao, by switching the context of interpretation, repeatedly changed the content of crucial terms like 'revolutionary', 'counter-revolutionary' and 'revisionist' so as to turn the attack first against one group then against another. Every time he did this, he changed his revolutionary message. By 1968, most people were totally unsure of what that message was: they guessed, and hoped that they were right, or they suited themselves. The confusion continued during the institutional phase of the Cultural Revolution, as the message moved from the far left (1968-70), to a more moderate stance (late 1970-72), then back to the left (1973-74), before renewed moderation (1975) and a final swing

to the left (late 1975 and 1976). These switches reflected the power struggle between more radical and moderate factions within the Chinese leadership, which Mao played off against each other to ensure that no one faction ever became too powerful and threatened his dominance (Cf. Dittmer 1987, 108-40, 172; Joseph 1984). All the switches were supported by political campaigns in which the Chinese people were required to condemn, alternately, the 'revisionism' of the modefates or the 'ultra-leftism' of the radicals. The result was widespread confusion, even amongst cadres, about what the proper revolutionary line really was. In the words of one of Dittmer's informants, 'Before the Cultural Revolution, I would believe that Mao could reform people's thinking. After the Cultural Revolution, I did not know what kind of thinking Mao wanted to reform.' Or as another said, 'If it was me, my thinking would change back and forth many times. I was afraid, therefore I would change.' (Dittmer 1987, 173).

For many people, a turning point came with the disgrace of Lin Biao in 1971. Most had been prepared to accept that Liu Shaoqi was a traitor whom Mao had been waiting to expose, but when Lin Biao - the high priest of Mao-worship - was revealed as yet another traitor and a secret ally of Liu's, the strain on most people's credulity was too great. Mao's 'close comrade-in-arms', his designated successor, had allegedly all long been plotting against Mao and the revolution, and Mao had just been waiting for the correct moment to expose him! If this were true, then for many years the press and the Communist Party had misled the Chinese people by portraying Lin as Mao's most loyal follower. If it were false, then the newspapers and the Party were misleading the people now. In either case, the official media and the Party had no credibility, and Mao himself was either fallible or guilty of deception. Moreover, the downfall of Lin Biao was a lesson in the nature of politics amongst the Chinese élite. All but the most naïve observers began to suspect that when the press and Party mobilized the people to condemn a particular leader, the intention was not to defend the revolution but to use the people as a weapon in a ruthless struggle for power. One young peasant in Chen Village spoke for many: 'I had felt faithful to Mao, but that Lin Biao stuff affected my thinking. Things always seemed to be changing at the top. You couldn't trust everything they said.' Another youth said bluntly: 'We came to see that the leaders up

there could say today that something is round; tomorrow, that it's flat. We lost faith in the system.' (Chan, Madsen & Unger 1984, 231).

Cynicism grew when the latest change in the Party line resulted in the sudden condemnation of leaders who distanced themselves from Maoist policies emphasising revolutionary struggle. When Deng Xiaoping came under criticism and was dismissed for the second time in 1976, his speeches were distributed for criticism - speeches in which he called for more intellectual freedom and an end to victimization, and in which he emphasised economic development and improved living standards rather than class struggle. We had to study those speeches and condemn them, using them as evidence that 'The capitalist roader is still on the road!' As Jung Chang records (1992, 654-56), most of us went through the motions of criticizing Deng, but we felt sympathy with his words, not our own. Then, when an earthquake shattered Tangshan and my own city of Tianjin, and we had to sit amidst the ruins criticizing Deng rather than trying to restore our lives, the anti-Deng discourse seemed irrelevant to our needs and a complete waste of time.

The struggle against Deng was spearheaded by Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, and her clique. By late 1975 they had gained almost total control of the media, and they used it not only to criticise respected politicians like Deng and Zhou Enlai, but to attack the very popular policies with which they were identified. The discourse which they promoted, however, was counterproductive: it identified Jiang Qing and her supporters with unpopular policies, and people made cynical by the Lin Biao affair resented the politically motivated attacks on leaders whose reputations far exceeded those of their critics. The attacks further discredited the media, whose monopoly on information began partially to disintegrate. Eager to know what lay behind the official mask of Chinese politics, people in the cities increasingly resorted to 'sidestreet news' (*xiaodao xiaoxi*) - gossip and rumour - in an attempt to get more reliable information. The most common targets of these stories were Jiang Qing and her entourage. Stories about her love life before she met Mao, about her liking for foreign movies, about her alleged baldness, and about her desire to succeed Mao as a de facto empress all circulated amongst people who hoped that they could trust each other not to betray the confidence. In some circles people even began to

whisper that Mao was senile and to say that the young women who were seen with him in pictures and on newsreels were actually his mistresses, procured by his bodyguard Wang Dongxin. On the other side, stories were told which reflected well on Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping, the leaders who represented the best hope for stability, prosperity, and an end to revolutionary turmoil. Zhou was depicted as wise, clever and humane, while the stories about Deng focused on his intellectual mastery, his shrewdness and his quick wit (cf. Nathan 1986,175-7; Liu 1986, 272-5).

Many people who were disillusioned with the extreme Maoists and their policies began to believe that they could not be the only ones with doubts. Tentatively, at first, they began to share their dissatisfaction with friends. Soon they were speaking privately in subversive discourses which contradicted some of the things which they said in public. People who valued education began to mutter about the sad state of the universities: 'college in name, middle school teaching materials, and elementary school level' (*daxue mingtang, zhongxue jiaocai, xiaoxue chengdu*) (Dittmer & Chen 1981, 64). Workers, who heard and were sometimes forced to repeat claims about how the abolition of material incentives had boosted productivity, knew the reality in their own factories: 'low efficiency, sharing the common bowl of rice, and a job as permanent as iron' (*di xiaolü, da guofan, tiefanwan*). They could mouth the idealistic rhetoric about the superior efficiency of work based purely on moral incentives, but many did as little work as possible, for 'Work or no work, the result is the same' (*gan bu gan, yige yang*). (Dittmer & Chen 1981, 49).

The peasants had long been the main exponents of subversive discourses. They were the economic group most sorely oppressed, they were often emboldened by 'good' class backgrounds, and they were only rarely subjected to the rituals of small group criticism and self-criticism which made people in the cities fear betrayal by so-called 'friends' if they used a word out of place (cf. Whyte 1974). Many of the peasants had been grumbling amongst themselves ever since collectivization, and their cynicism and complaints had by no means abated by the 1970s. One rural saying went like this: 'The public work is slowly done, following the crowd. Everyone gets ten work points. Why should I work harder?' (Zhou 1996, 30). In Chen Village, some of

the younger peasants composed sardonic doggerel about cadre corruption and their own casual attitude to collective labour:

> A feast is not mine to eat,
> "Spoils" are not mine to grab.
> Only labouring day in and out,
> Why not go to the fields for a rest?
> [Chan, Madsen & Unger 1984, 259].

Kate Zhou, who lived with the peasants during the institutional phase of the Cultural Revolution, learned that they called the Party secretaries at the brigade and commune levels 'local emperors' (*tuhuangdi*) and that cadres in general, adept at fleecing the peasants for the benefit of the state, were known as 'cadres with scissors' (*jiandao ganbu*). She even heard outright condemnation: 'The state is like a crazy man, always picking those things that will hurt us most.' (Zhou 1996, 29, 31, 33). As always, the peasants were the ones furthest down what Maoists called the 'capitalist road'.

The development of counter-languages was a sign that, by Mao's final years, the system of linguistic engineering had begun to self-destruct. The institutional supports for the system were more formidable than ever and the Maoist leaders' passion for linguistic uniformity was undiminished, but attempts to impose that uniformity were less and less effective. People in the cities, following weakly in the peasants' wake, had often developed a cynicism which at times crept into the language of familiar discourse. Moreover, although people continued to say the right things in the company of cadres, activists and strangers, their faith in a good deal of what they said was collapsing. The underlying cause of this loss of faith was that Maoist discourse was applied in ways which discredited it: people were made to say things at variance with their own experience, they were made to say things which denied deeply entrenched preferences, and they were made to say things *today* which contradicted what they were made to say *yesterday*. In part, this enforcement of counter-productive discourses occurred because the linguistic engineers gave the Chinese people too little credit for intelligence, regarding them as machines who could be programmed and re-programmed. But in part, it was because persuasion was not the only goal. If people could be made to say, repeatedly, things which they knew to be untrue, then this

demonstrated the extent of their submission. To that extent, it did not matter if people silently resisted the anti-Deng discourse in which they publicly participated, for if Deng's secret supporters could be induced to join the chorus of condemnation, this demonstrated to them and to all the world that Jiang Qing and her friends were the ones in charge. Linguistic engineering was not just a mechanism of revolutionary conversion, but a weapon which could be used to intimidate, to legitimate and to control.

9.4 Failure: (3) After Mao

Mao Zedong died on 9 September 1976. Some people wept out of genuine grief; some, like myself, were relieved when the tears came, helped along by the grief of others; some cried because they feared that, with Mao gone, his wife Jiang Qing and her cronies would have a free hand; and some buried their heads and pretended to cry, hoping they would not be discovered.

The grief and pseudo-grief of many Chinese turned into rejoicing when it was learned that Jiang Qing and her supporters, now dubbed the Gang of Four, had been arrested on 6 October. In Tianjin, there was intense excitement and relief amongst the intellectuals, and many people from all social groups joined eagerly in the huge, officially organized demonstration which celebrated the Gang's downfall. In Beijing, a young Canadian-Chinese student, Jan Wong, watched the public reaction in astonishment:

> People literally danced in the streets. Firecrackers exploded all night. Liquor store shelves were emptied as people rushed to drink toasts ... Everywhere, I saw people wandering around with broad smiles and big hangovers. It seemed that the entire capital was marching deliriously to Tiananmen Square. Artists who had suffered under Madame Mao's cultural fascism sketched devastating caricatures and pasted them up in the square. Ordinary people took turns spitting on them to see who could score the most direct hits. [Wong 1997, 177].

Not everyone was happy. There were cadres, identified with the Gang's policies, who had reason to be nervous about their futures; and there were members of the red classes, particularly 'worker-peasant-soldier

students', who soon began to worry that the Gang's demise might bring new, meritocratic policies which would harm their futures. But these voices were silenced by fear, and by the genuine elation of the majority.

With the departure of the group blamed for the worst repression, most people felt much more free to speak openly. What they now began to say sometimes shocked Western admirers of Mao who had taken the Chinese people at their word, thinking that they believed all the formulae which the linguistic engineers compelled them to mouth. One such admirer was Jan Wong, who after four years in China still thought that people meant it when they declared their enthusiasm for the Cultural Revolution and the New Born Things. She was shattered when everyone she knew celebrated the downfall of the Gang of Four, then told her that 'the Cultural Revolution had been a bad, bad thing' and that 'they had been waiting for years for the madness to end.' 'I felt betrayed,' she recalls, 'like the victim of a massive practical joke. Everyone had lied to me – my classmates and teachers, my friends and relatives. I knew it was not personal. They had had no choice.' She had learned what most Chinese adults already knew – that 'the sets were fake and people were just speaking their lines with less and less conviction.' 'Nobody believed in the revolution anymore', she said with pardonable exaggeration. 'They hadn't for a long time, and I had been too stupid to see it.' (Wong 1997, 178, 185-6).

At this stage, the only revolution which most people rejected was Mao's 'continuous revolution', with its endless convulsions, its periodic crackdowns on small-scale private production by the peasants, and its indefinite postponement of the rewards which were supposed to come from revolutionary endeavour. This was the revolution which was extolled in the distinctive discourse of the Cultural Revolution – the revolution which made people's lives miserable and which they blamed on the Gang of Four. But most people's attachment to any sort of revolutionary politics or utopian vision was now fragile, and a more general disillusionment was soon to come. One of its agents was Mao's successor, Hua Guofeng, who had ordered the Gang's arrest. Hua claimed Mao's mantle, and he continued to manipulate revolutionary discourse in the traditional Maoist fashion. Everyone was now expected to accuse the Gang of Four of being revisionists bent on

restoring capitalism. As usual, school English textbooks were pressed into the attack:

> A: The Gang of Four Anti-Party clique wanted to usurp Party and state power and restore capitalism. We Red Guards, never allow them!
>
> B: That's right. The struggle against the Gang of Four is a life-and-death struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, between socialism and capitalism and between Marxism and revisionism. We must fight against them. [*English*, vol. 3, Henan n.d. [1977?]].

Members of the Gang were now condemned in precisely the same terms as they had used to attack Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping and all the other capitalist-roaders. Indeed, they were described in the same terms as Lin Biao. The targets changed, depending on who was in or out of power, but the discourse remained the same. Even people who were delighted to see the last of the Gang were unconvinced by the way in which they were required to condemn the 'Gang of Four Anti-Party clique'. Cynicism about linguistic engineering, already far advanced, became all-pervasive.

To bolster his frail claim to legitimacy, Hua also sought to appropriate Mao's legacy and to make himself the star of a new personality cult. People were supposed to say the sorts of things which they read in the Party press and the school textbooks:

> The whole Party, the whole army and the whole people love Chairman Hua. Following Chairman Hua, we will carry out Chairman Mao's behests and make revolution for ever. [*English*, vol. 4, Henan 1978].

The sudden creation of a personality cult around a relative nonentity like Hua again made many people cynical, and the prospect of 'revolution forever' filled them with despair.

Materialism, which had begun to fill the void as utopian hopes faded in the later Mao era, now became rampant. In December 1976, Mao's article 'On Ten Major Relationships' was republished in the Party press and set for serious study and discussion in all work units. However, these 'ten major relationships' were soon transformed by

popular doggerel into 'ten major requirements' which women demanded of prospective suitors:

> Yi fang jiaju dai shafa,
> Er lao jian zai neng kan wa.
> San gulu yi xiang dai kacha,
> Si ji yifu chuan kuaiba.
> Wu guan duanzheng yi mi ba,
> Liu qin bu ren wu qiangua.
> Qishi yuan gongzi dai fujia,
> Ba mian linglong hui shuohua.
> Jiu yan bu zhan zhi he cha,
> Shifen manyi jiu jian ta.
>
> (One room full of furniture with sofa,
> Two parents healthy enough to baby sit.
> Three turns and one sound[1] plus camera,
> Four seasons' clothes with wool.
> Five features[2] good looking and body tall,
> Six relationships denied.
> Seventy dollars in wages plus a bonus,
> Popular and articulate with all.
> No alcohol, no cigarettes, only tea,
> I'll see him if the above are satisfactorily met.)[3]

The rapidity with which this verse spread throughout urban China was a manifestation of popular revulsion against demands for revolutionary self-sacrifice. It was also a sign that people were losing their fear, and that subversive discourses were no longer confined to discreet communication amongst people who trusted each other.

People's loss of fear was greatly assisted by the political resurrection of Deng Xiaoping. The Party's 'left' was weakened by the purge of the Gang of Four and its supporters, and this enabled Deng's supporters to persuade a reluctant Hua to restore him to his former positions in July 1977. Hua clung to the trappings of office until 1981,

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[1]The 'three turns' were three things which had parts which turned: a bike, a sewing machine and a watch. The 'one sound' was a radio. The phrase 'three turns and one sound' was used to summarise the material aspirations of the later Mao years.

[2]'Five features': the features of the face.

[3]The translation is a slightly modified version of the one in Dittmer & Chen 1981, 51.

but Deng achieved dominance fairly quickly after his return and shattered both the discourse of praise for the Cultural Revolution and the discourse of denial with which the Party had sought to erase memories of the sufferings which so many had endured under Mao's rule. What Deng did was seize on Mao's maxim 'seek truth from facts' and promote it as the essence of Mao's Thought. People had learned, under Mao, that the only 'facts' which they were allowed to discover were those consistent with Mao's Thought, but now Deng said that Mao himself had made mistakes and that his Thought required them to 'make practice the sole criterion of truth' (Lieberthal 1995, 129-33). In this way, Deng adroitly manipulated Mao's own words to destroy the worship of his Thought. He also made people less afraid to talk about 'the facts', as they saw them, and he destroyed the basis for any continued attempts to re-make people's minds by enforcing wholesale recitation of scripts from official discourse.

Once people lost their fear, there followed an outpouring of bitterness against the wrongs which millions of people had suffered under Mao's rule: from those declared Rightists in 1957 in a campaign which Deng himself, as the Party's General Secretary, had directed; from people who had been persecuted for trivial or non-existent offences by over-zealous or vindictive superiors; and, most numerous of all, from the victims of the Cultural Revolution. They wrote letters or travelled in person to Beijing, where 200,000 cadres were given the job of investigating their grievances (Nathan 1986, 29); they plastered walls, including the famous 'democracy wall' in Beijing, with posters which spelled out their complaints; and they told their stories, and the stories of others who had suffered, in a torrent of 'wounded literature' (e.g., Barmé & Lee 1979; Feng 1991). Much of this was actively encouraged by the Party, which was concerned both to remove a dangerous accumulation of bitterness, and to direct the blame away from Mao and the Party and towards against individual wrongdoers, Lin Biao and the Gang of Four. But no one in China thinks that the millions who raised their voices were simply following the new Party line. They spoke from the heart, and when in 1978 and 1979 some began to argue that the root cause of the injustices was a continuing lack of democracy and accountability, they were crushed (Nathan 1986).

By the time Mao died, many people had lost faith in the official media. Interviewing a sample of 69 people who left China, mostly in the late 1970s or early 1980s, Andrew Nathan (1986, 173-5) divided them into three groups on the basis of their attitudes towards the media. Members of one group read newspapers and listened to broadcasts because they needed to know what the Party wanted them to believe, but they remained agnostic about the accuracy of what they were told. Members of the second group openly scorned the reliability of the media, dismissing most news stories as untrue or distorted. Members of the third group agreed that the official press was unreliable, but felt that they could often decode it to ascertain the truth if they studied it carefully and interpreted it with the help of 'side-street news', occasional access to 'internal publications' intended for cadres, and information illicitly obtained from foreign radio broadcasts. Not one person in Nathan's sample believed that the official media were generally reliable (Nathan 1986, 180).

The Party realized that the media were widely scorned, and when Deng Xiaoping gained the ascendancy he took steps to restore the media's credibility. The result was a significant increase in reliable reporting. However, in 1982 a survey of readers in Beijing still found that only 24 percent regarded the newspapers as 'believable', while 21 percent saw them as 'often or always untruthful'. The remaining 55 percent described the newspapers as 'basically believable', which presumably meant that they had no reason to misreport most things, but distorted or invented some stories for political purposes. In a survey in Tianjin, many readers accused the papers of 'swaying and swinging' for political motives, while a critique published in 1984 reported that 'many readers disbelieved on principle 20 to 50 percent of what they read in the press' - a finding which the author blamed on the fact that '"the propaganda flavour is still too thick."'(Nathan 1986, 191).

If faith in the official media had been shaken, so had faith in socialism. People already knew that after years of 'socialist construction' China was still very poor, and they were now able to contrast that poverty with the achievements of the West because Deng, to strengthen his hand in pushing China down the road of the 'Four Modernizations', allowed television to show honest reports about the

outside world. Increasingly, socialism seemed like a nice ideal which had not produced the material progress which people so desperately wanted. Disillusionment was particularly strong amongst members of the younger generation. In 1979/80, students at the élite Fudan university in Shanghai were asked anonymously what they believed in. Only a third said 'communism', nearly a quarter said 'fate' and a quarter said 'nothing at all' (Dittmer 1987, 260 n.134). In another college, students in one class were asked to indicate whether they believed in socialism, capitalism, religion, atheism or fatalism. Eighty-five percent chose fatalism; not one chose socialism (Shirk 1984, 56). And in Guangdong province, when a rumour started in 1979 that the government would not longer stop people from crossing to Hong Kong, a swarm of young people from villages near the border overwhelmed the guards and went to seek their fortunes in the capitalist colony. By the time Hong Kong took measures to stem the exodus, Chen Village, for example, had lost nearly all its young men - some 200 of them - including the two sons of the Party secretary (Chan, Madsen & Unger 1984, 265-67). The exodus stopped only when the Hong Kong government refused to issue the new immigrants with identity cards and imposed heavy fines on employers who hired workers who could not produce a card. All these disillusioned young people had recited the formulae of Mao worship and socialist self-sacrifice throughout their school years.

Once people had lost their revolutionary faith, what remained was the threat of nihilism - a threat which could be kept at bay only by some other ideology or by the determined pursuit of wealth and personal rewards (Ci 1994). Political liberalism has filled the void for some people, especially in the cities (Nathan & Shi 1993), and it has been crushed whenever it seems to pose a challenge to the Party's monopoly of power. For many other people, however, Deng Xiaoping's slogan 'To get rich is glorious!' is the key to life's meaning. Table 9.1 summarizes the results of a social survey in Zhejiang:

Table 9.1

Do You Agree That the Goal of Life Is to Make Money? (percentages)

Occupation	*Agree*	*Don't Care*	*Disagree*
Cadre	40	19	41
Worker	66	5	31
Farmer	81	6	13
Private Business person	59	15	26

Source: Li Qian, Yu Xianyan & Shi Xilai, 'Studies on Elements That Influence Social Values and Social Behaviour', *Sociology and Social Investigation*, 5, (1992), 11-20, reproduced in Zhou 1996, 165.

The results of the survey would probably shock most Westerners, whose materialism is more muted. Two results stand out. First, even the cadres have been heavily corrupted by materialistic values, with about as many agreeing with the statement that 'the goal of life is to make money' as opposing it. Second, the most materialistic of all are the farmers, as we should call the post-Mao peasants, whose attitudes are easy to understand because for so long the Party kept them poor.

During the Mao era, the peasants were compelled to recite formulae praising collectivism, condemning individualism and abhorring private profits, but most remained determined to 'travel the capitalist road' once they thought they could get away with it. Their opportunity came when power struggles within the Chinese leadership after Mao's death created uncertainty amongst cadres about the future direction of agricultural policy, and when the cadres' waning ideological commitment to collectivization made them susceptible to bribes and pressure. As early as 1977, peasants in a few areas secretly arranged with local cadres to abandon collective farming and restore family production and the practice spread from 1978. The peasants at first acted spontaneously, without any organization or leadership, and without explicit encouragement from reformers within the Party. They were able to get away with it because they bribed local cadres with a share of the profits, and because many cadres were reluctant to confront them. Senior Party leaders at first condemned what was happening, but they were unwilling to take the decisive and ruthless action required to stop it - perhaps in some cases because they secretly

sympathised with the peasants. Their vacillation lasted long enough for family production to become established in large areas of China and demonstrate its superiority to collective production. Then reformers like Deng Xiaoping and Zhao Ziyang used its success to argue that it should be adopted generally. After 1982, the 'household responsibility system', as it was called, was extended by government decree to the rest of the country. Although peasants in some areas felt that the form which decollectivization took did not suit their needs, a large majority either accepted it happily or adopted it eagerly (Zhou 1996; Kelliher 1992; Watson 1983, 1984/5).

Within eight years, according to one estimate, real incomes in the countryside trebled (Zhou 1996, 71). This not only reflected the enormous increases in agricultural productivity, but the fact that the China's new class of market-oriented farmers began to put their labour and capital into commercial enterprises and rural-based secondary industry. Moreover, despite harassment from the police, they began to flout the restrictions on residence which since 1956 had kept peasants in the countryside. They have flooded into the cities, setting up numerous businesses and supplying much of the labour for the spectacular growth of new, large-scale industries. Some have become millionaires. In bursting the chains with which the Party bound them to collective poverty, the one-time peasants have emerged as the most dynamic force in China's market economy (Zhou 1996).

And what of linguistic engineering after Mao? From 1978, with the rise of Deng Xiaoping, China fairly rapidly ceased to be a state in which the rulers had totalitarian ambitions. The state retreated from its goal of controlling all aspects of life, and it abandoned its attempt to bring about a comprehensive reform of human consciousness through linguistic engineering. Totalitarian goals were abandoned in favour of an authoritarianism which allowed people to say pretty much what they wanted in private, but crushed those who said in public anything which called into question the Party's right to rule. Moreover, the change to private production in the countryside and the much slower rise of private enterprise in the cities progressively undermined the power of the collective economic institutions through which the Party coerced, rewarded and manipulated the people. The institutional control of

people's lives which is required for a fully-fledged programme of linguistic engineering simply no longer exists.

What remains is an authoritarian Party with a socialist language inherited from the Maoist era - a language which is completely out of step with the realities of modern China. The incongruity is resolved by linguistic manipulation. China's emerging capitalist economy, in current Newspeak, is 'Chinese style socialism' (*you zhongguo tese de shehuizhuyi*), so called to distinguish it from classical socialism in which the state controls production. The fact that Mao Zedong was in this sense a classical socialist, not a 'Chinese style one', is conveniently forgotten, for Mao continues to be invoked as the Party's patron, his successes officially far more significant than his 'mistakes'. The continued use of the language of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought in official contexts masks the fact that a non-Maoist ideology now dominates the Party. That ideology seeks to combine dedicated pursuit of individual wealth with 'spiritual values' of civic responsibility and personal morality; and, despite the re-emergence of genuine economic classes and capitalist exploitation, it ignores the existence of class conflict altogether.

Mao's injunction 'Never forget class struggle!' was officially laid to rest in 1979, when virtually all members of the 'black' classes were pronounced 'reformed' and had their 'class hats' removed. The prejudice against them quickly subsided and in Chen Village by 1982 class origins no longer mattered much even in marriage decisions. Popular hostility had rested largely on official policies of discrimination which most 'red' and middle class people endorsed in order to avoid criticism, boost their own status and eliminate 'black' competition for education and jobs. Once official discrimination disappeared, so did the motive for popular prejudice. The new discourse of harmony within socialist society quickly triumphed, for most people wanted peace and the observed behaviour of the 'black categories' had nearly always been 'correct' and submissive. Thirty years of ritual vilification now counted almost for nothing.

And what of Mao himself? He continues as the father figure of the Party which has destroyed his legacy, and he retains much of his popularity with the masses. His portrait can still be found on altars in

some peasant homes, where it is worshipped along with the other gods, beneficent and malevolent, whom the peasants propitiate. In the cities, from the late 1980s, there developed a Mao-craze in which the Great Leader became a teenage icon, a fashion statement, an artistic motif and the object of commercial exploitation (Barmé 1996). In part, the craze fed off the success of linguistic engineering in endowing Mao, while he lived, with almost supernatural attributes. Popular ignorance of the real Mao was essential to the creation of the image, and popular ignorance sustains it to this day because the Party still conceals the enormity of his crimes. But the Mao-craze has roots, too, in the economic and social dislocations of the 1980s and 1990s. Mao is used as a symbol of a purer age to criticise the development of rampant corruption within the Party. He is invoked, too, by nervous workers in inefficient state enterprises who fear that the rise of the market might cost them their jobs. (Barmé 1996).

The appropriation of Mao by the people is a striking manifestation of the decline of linguistic engineering and of the rise of new discourses, uncontrolled by the Party. As a commercialized icon, as a symbol of anti-corruption, and as an enemy of the market, Mao has been appropriated by unofficial but highly visible discourses and used to embarrass the Party. So his continuing popularity is proof that the China which he created, with its centrally directed manipulation of a monolithic public discourse, is dead. The Party's leaders still control the language of Party and state, and most people still need to speak that language at times - especially in the cities, where the state sector remains large and most people still belong to Party-controlled *danwei* (work units). However, the engagement which most people have with the Party and the state has been drastically reduced, and it is still diminishing. In most contexts, public or private, people use language which has evolved free of state direction, and they invent and appropriate new linguistic forms as they see fit. One small example makes the point perfectly: the word 'comrade' - once the standard, revolutionary title of address - has dropped from common use, and this has cleared the way for it to render service in more restricted contexts. It has been appropriated by Beijing's gay and lesbian communities - a fate which is eminently fitting in view of recent revelations about Mao's private life. The Party has lost control of how people use the Chinese language, and Mao's great experiment in linguistic engineering is over.

CHAPTER 10

IMPLICATIONS FOR LINGUISTIC ENGINEERING

Mao's great experiment in linguistic engineering is worth studying in its own right. However, reflection on its successes and its failures can tell us something about linguistic engineering in general. This chapter will explore the implications of the Chinese case for theories of linguistic persuasion and for 'strong' and 'weak' versions of the Whorf hypothesis. It will also venture some generalizations about conditions which help or hinder attempts at persuasion through the manipulation of language and the control of discourse.

The Chinese case certainly demonstrates that linguistic engineering can affect people's beliefs, for we have seen that there was often - although by no means always - a striking correlation between what people were compelled to say and the beliefs which they came to hold. This much is obvious. What is more challenging is to specify the causal mechanisms which enabled the carefully scripted words of the linguistic engineers so often to produce the desired beliefs. In this thesis, I have used a variety of psychological theories, well tested in experimental and sometimes real-life contexts, to isolate the causal mechanisms, explaining why control of discourse had its profound, though uneven, impact on thought. That attempt at explanation could, in principle, have failed: we could have found that attitudes did not change when the theories said they should, or that the people whose attitudes changed the most were those whose attitudes should have changed the least. In fact, the attempt to explain attitude change in terms of the theories did not fail, but succeeded admirably. When the persuasive mechanisms identified by the theories were present, they resulted in attitude change unless there were strong countervailing tendencies from other sources. This case study of language-based persuasion therefore adds to the weight of evidence in support of the theories. It may be useful to illustrate this with examples:

- If increased familiarity with Marxist-Leninist-Maoist terminology had made that terminology more distasteful, this would have counted against the theory of 'mere exposure', which predicts that familiarity

will produce more favourable attitudes. In fact, the prediction is borne out by the Chinese case, for the new terminology quickly became natural and attractive, although it had at first seemed obscure, unnatural and un-Chinese. (See ch. 2).

- If the repetition of unsupported statements had not tended to make people believe them, this would have counted against the 'validity effect'. In fact, repetition of such statements *did* tend to produce belief. It failed only where there were strong countervailing tendencies, as when the statements were inconsistent with personal experience. (See chs 2, 9).

- If people had come to think well of things associated with negative words and badly of things associated with positive words, this would have counted against the theory of higher order conditioning. In fact, there was a strong tendency for people to think well of things associated with positive words and to think badly of things associated with negative words. This tendency prevailed except when there were strong countervailing influences, as when the experience of starvation offset the influence of verbal conditioning in favour of the 'Great Leap Forward'. (See chs 2, 9).

- If people had not tended to adopt the attitudes modelled by individuals and reference groups, this would have counted against modelling theory and reference group theory. In fact, attitudes were adopted as predicted by the theories except when there were strong countervailing influences - as when the attitudes modelled were clearly inconsistent with the audience's experience or interests. (See chs 2, 9).

- If people had suffered dissonance as a result of making uncoerced revolutionary statements, but did not shift their attitudes in the direction of those statements, this would have counted against the theory of cognitive dissonance. In fact, attitudes did tend to change in the direction of counter-attitudinal but uncoerced statements. Moreover, the recalcitrance of political prisoners and many higher intellectuals corroborates the theory's prediction that little attitude change would result from dissonance caused by counter-attitudinal statements made under coercion. (See ch. 2).

- If people with hitherto unformed views had not tended to adopt the attitudes which they expressed in revolutionary discourse, this would have counted against the theory of self-perception. In fact, such people - for example the young - showed an unusually strong tendency to adopt the attitudes expressed by the things which they said. (See chs 2, 3, 8, 9)

- If the constant repetition of revolutionary formulae had not made the political concepts and schemas to which they were linked more accessible than rival political concepts and schemas, this would have counted against what we said in chapter 1 about associative priming, spreading activation and the 'interference effect'. In fact, the concepts and schemas linked to revolutionary formulae achieved clear predominance, being used to classify and analyse social reality even by refugees who had fled to Hong Kong. (See chs 2, 9).

Taken together, the theories listed above identify an impressive list of mechanisms through which language can effect thought - mechanisms which operated powerfully in Mao's China. Mao's success in activating these mechanisms and using them to bring about massive attitude change broadly confirms the intuitions behind 'weak' Whorfian claims that language influences thought. This judgment must be qualified, however, by pointing out that Whorf himself considered directly only one of the mechanisms of linguistic influence discussed in this thesis: the effect of habitually used *semantic categories* on thought. He did not mention mechanisms which are activated by habitually used *expressions with propositional content*, and indeed most of them were identified only after his death. Partly for this reason, the controversy surrounding the 'Whorf hypothesis' has not mentioned the validity effect, modelling, the verbal behaviour of reference groups, operant conditioning, dissonance and self-perception. Habitually used expressions with propositional content, however, can properly be considered 'linguistic', and their manipulation was central to the form of linguistic engineering practised in China. Our case study strongly reinforces other evidence that their persuasive effects can be very powerful.

If we treat habitually used propositional expressions as relevant to the Whorf hypothesis, then the claim that 'language influences thought' is both incontrovertible and highly significant. We would, however, still have no grounds for accepting the 'strong' version of the Whorf hypothesis - for accepting that we are trapped within the categories of our spoken language, that concepts which are nameless are unimaginable, or that different languages produce incommensurable world views. The arguments against such 'strong Whorfian' claims were considered in chapter 1 and they seem to me conclusive. Moreover, not one of the mechanisms of linguistic persuasion identified in this thesis is deterministic in the sense that it produces its effects under all circumstances. Indeed, we have seen that their persuasive effects can always be over-ridden by an encounter with more powerful tendencies which work in the opposite direction. Our examination of linguistic engineering in China gives as much evidence of the power of these countervailing tendencies as it does of the persuasive power of linguistic manipulation: when no countervailing tendencies are present, linguistic engineering is remarkably effective; when such tendencies are present, its effectiveness declines. Our case study reveals that countervailing tendencies are associated with five major obstacles to persuasion:

1. *The existence of deeply entrenched beliefs opposed to the linguistic engineers' message.* Such beliefs are strongly supported by a wide framework of schematically organized beliefs. They can be changed, if at all, only by argument or evidence which weakens those supporting beliefs. Linguistic engineering did not convince higher intellectuals that they were worse judges than the Party of what was true and what was false within their areas of expertise; and slogans did not convince the peasants that cadres armed with Mao's Thought knew what they were talking about when it came to deep ploughing, close planting and trying to grow wheat and cotton in sub-tropical Guangdong province. (See chs 2, 9).

2. *Experience which contradicts the linguistic engineers' message.* Most people in rural areas knew that the 'Great Leap Forward' was actually a 'Disastrous Leap Backward'; they knew from their own experience that the 'people's' communes were not controlled

by 'the people' but by the cadres; and if they were sentenced to a labour camp for promoting decollectivization, they knew that the 'revolutionary humanitarianism' which spared them the death penalty but let them starve was based on revolutionary indifference to their suffering. (See chs 2, 9; on 'revolutionary humanitarianism' see Wu 1994, 88-174).

3. *Interests which are adversely affected by the linguistic engineers' message.* People of 'bad' class origins might shout 'Never forget class struggle!' along with everyone else, but as the principal targets of class struggle they hardly ever meant what they said; intellectually gifted 'non-red' children might sing the praises of 'worker-peasant-soldier students', but they nearly always believed that more able students like themselves were the ones who should go to university; and school children might say pious things about how 'educated youth' should 'serve the people' in the countryside, but only an idealistic minority were willing to leave the cities and live out their lives as peasants. (See chs 2, 6, 9).

4. *Contradictions within the linguistic engineers' message.* Such contradictions, of course, tend to shake people's faith in the discourse as a whole. They are a particular problem if, as in China, the discourse is used as a weapon in battles amongst members of the political élite, so that the impeccably revolutionary leader of yesterday becomes the class enemy of today. The problem is even worse if, as in China, a stark dualism of good and evil, recognizing no shades of grey, requires the discourse to depict the fallen leader as bad from the start. This makes it impossible to say that a once-good leader turned bad at the end. Rather, the leader's entire history must be blackened, and this discredits the discourse during the entire period in which it had portrayed the leader as a model of revolutionary virtue. (See chs 5, 9).

5. *The emergence of subversive discourses.* If the discourse becomes sufficiently discredited, people begin to suspect that others must share their doubts. Tentatively, they seek to ease the guilt aroused by their doubts by confiding in friends, seeking to

confirm that they are not alone. If they are not betrayed, subversive discourses develop which engender cynicism about the official discourse, even if they do not directly attack it. This had begun to happen in China by the time Mao died in 1976. (See chs 2, 9).

When none of these obstacles to persuasion is present, linguistic engineering is generally very effective. People are easily swayed by a dominant discourse if they are at least open-minded towards its message, if the message does not come into conflict with their experience, if it does not damage their self-esteem or interests, if it is internally consistent, and if there are no rival discourses. During Mao's rule, these conditions were often met, for many themes in the dominant discourse offered unity, hope and empowerment, and they dealt with matters on which people had few sources of information outside the discourse. The utopian vision which inspired the discourse was not destroyed in the countryside until the disaster of the Great Leap Forward, and it lingered on in the cities until Mao's final years when it was weakened by élite factionalism, accumulating failures, and the indefinite deferment of the promised happiness. It was extinguished completely, perhaps, only with the death of Mao, the revolution's God, whose still favourable public image was itself the finest creation of linguistic engineering.

When a discourse loses its power because it contradicts people's experience, damages their interests or discredits itself with inconsistency, linguistic engineers with totalitarian aspirations customarily try to remedy the situation by intensifying their efforts to make people say 'correct' things. They do this because they have an exaggerated belief in the power of a centrally controlled discourse. They put such faith in the power of words because they make four crucial mistakes. First, they underestimate people's intelligence, for any fully-fledged programme of linguistic engineering is based on something like Lenin's assumption, which we met in chapter 2, that 'People for the most part ... don't know how to think, they only *learn words by heart*'.' (Quoted in Young 1991, 208)). The fact is that even in a society with many illiterates, most people know a lot about a few matters; they have entrenched beliefs on rather more; and they are perfectly capable of critical (if not always intelligent) thought when

they are told to say things which contradict entrenched existing beliefs. They are equally capable of spotting contradictions between what they were compelled to say yesterday and what they are compelled to say today. Linguistic engineers with totalitarian ambitions are in one respect the most likely to run into trouble, for they presume to meddle in the details of everyday life and at times reveal their ignorance even to the most isolated peasants.

Second, the more ambitious linguistic engineers overestimate the effectiveness of 'top-down processing' and underestimate the effectiveness of 'bottom-up information'. Even if we were able to think only in the categories given to us by the linguistic engineers, we could still contradict their message as long as the language still possessed a term for negation. We could, for example, deny that the 'Great Leap Forward' was either 'great' or a 'leap forward'. In fact, our thought can never be limited to the categories licensed by linguistic engineers, for as we saw in chapter 1 the language in which we think is influenced by the language which we speak but is not identical with it. This will always give us the potential to *transcend* the categories of the linguistic engineers, reclassifying reality in the 'language of thought'. Such reclassification is not simply the product of a brain working in isolation, but a process in which our perceptual and cognitive apparatus, honed by Darwinian processes over millions of years, grasps aspects of reality which are relevant to our current purposes. In this way, the 'language of thought' responds to observations and experience, providing 'bottom up information' which corrects our concepts and schemas. That is why linguistic engineers so often fail when they try to conceal reality by making people say things which contradict what they have seen, heard, felt or otherwise learned through personal experience.

Third, linguistic engineers with totalitarian aspirations often underestimate the resilience of the human ego. Linguistic engineering works best when it serves people's interests and self-image. In China, formulae praising the poor and lower-middle peasants as a leading class worked well amongst members of that class, and slogans which celebrated class struggle and revolutionary invincibility inspired and empowered Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. However, revolutionary discourse was far less successful amongst those whom it

denigrated or those whose interests it damaged. Members of the black categories who were ritually cursed on account of their class origins did not accept that they deserved their fate; nor did the millions of people persecuted during the Cultural Revolution, or the intellectuals condemned as Rightists after the 'Hundred Flowers' campaign. Self-interest and self-respect led intellectuals to resent their subordination to workers or semiliterate cadres; and a desire to control their own lives and better themselves fuelled the peasants' dissatisfaction at their subordination to the cadres and their exploitation by the state. Linguistic engineering failed to persuade any of these groups to like policies which kept them poor, which discriminated against them, which damaged their self-esteem, or which punished them unfairly. They rejected those parts of the discourse which praised such policies.

Fourth, linguistic engineers have never grappled effectively with the self-destructive tendencies inherent in a linguistic virtuocracy. In China, as in other virtuocracies, the rulers were aware that opportunists could use virtuous words to seek advancement, and that even secret class enemies could 'wave the red flag to oppose the red flag'. Attempts to solve the problem, however, only made it worse. Mao's paranoia about secret opponents who hid behind linguistic virtue led to the Cultural Revolution, while in the Soviet Union and Cambodia the paranoia of Stalin and Pol Pot led to reigns of terror which destroyed millions, including many leading communists. In all three cases the hunt for traitors camouflaged by linguistic rectitude merely accentuated the gulf between words and attitudes: on the one hand, it made more people fear and even hate the regime; on the other, it made everyone put on an even more strenuous show of linguistic virtue in order to avoid suspicion. Under these circumstances, virtuous words became increasingly suspect, and their power to persuade through modelling revolutionary attitudes diminished. Often, 'correct' language was seen instead as modelling strategies of survival or self-advancement. So the reign of linguistic virtue began to subvert revolutionary purposes, engendering cynicism rather than idealistic commitment.

Although linguistic engineers with totalitarian aspirations seem always to over-rate the power of discourse, they rarely underestimate the necessity of coercion. The leader who put most faith in discourse

was Mao Zedong, who during the 'free mobilization' phase of the Cultural Revolution used discourse to mobilize the people against the Party, virtually destroying the coercive hierarchy which had enforced obedience and monitored and corrected interpretation. Mao's bold experiment has important lessons to teach us about linguistic engineering, for it enables us to observe discourse, interpretation and behaviour when people have been freed from centralized coercion. What happened is instructive. Semantically, the discourse remained intact, as people more than ever before sought to justify their every action by quoting Mao and using 'correct' language in a constantly increasing range of contexts. Pragmatic interpretations of the discourse, however, diverged as soon as Mao withdrew the Party 'work teams' which had been guiding interpretation and orchestrating revolutionary criticism. Most 'red class' students were convinced that Mao was telling them to attack intellectuals and anyone connected with the 'bad' classes; by contrast, most middle and 'bad' class students, together with a minority of 'red class' class students who had got into trouble with the work teams, believed that Mao was appealing to them to attack the work teams and the Party itself. As it happened, this latter interpretation was the one which Mao wanted to prevail in late 1966 and early 1967, but once the 'rebel' Red Guards and revolutionary workers had done his bidding and destroyed the Party Mao lost control of them too. Whatever he said was subject to divergent interpretations, for his word was always interpreted in the context of assumptions which reflected the opposing interests and political aspirations of different groups. As a result, the Cultural Revolution descended into chaos. (See chs 3, 4, 5).

The chaotic outcome of 'free mobilization' demonstrates that it is not enough to control what people *say* and what their words mean *semantically:* it is also necessary to control the *assumptions* which people use in assigning real life referents to the words - the assumptions which they use to arrive at a *pragmatic interpretation.* In other words, linguistic engineering in any narrow sense is not enough: in a country where a diversity of interests and experiences gives people different interpretive assumptions, the control of language must always be supplemented by a coercive hierarchy which monitors interpretation, corrects errors and supplies the assumptions which people need if they are to avoid still more misinterpretations. In the

absence of such a hierarchy, unanimity of pragmatic interpretation will often break down: people will select the referents of terms according to assumptions which vary in accordance with their different experiences, interests and aspirations. This is precisely what Relevance Theory would lead us to expect (cf. ch. 1).

The diversity of interpretation which followed the removal of centralized Party control was exaggerated by the nature of Mao's writings and speeches. They were composed over many decades, in differing circumstances and for a variety of audiences. This ensured that they had many differing emphases which, if pressed a little, could yield contradictory principles. They posed, in a less extreme form, the same problems of interpretation as the Bible, which is read in startlingly diverse ways by Christians who possess different interpretive assumptions. In both cases, common readings across diverse populations are possible only with the aid of a hierarchy - of cadres or of clergy - which monitors interpretation and curbs heresy. If the hierarchy fragments or is removed, then interpretations proliferate.

The problem of differing pragmatic interpretations can be reduced if linguistic engineering is supplemented by a programme of social engineering designed to promote social homogeneity - a programme which eliminates as far as possible all barriers which divide society into groups with different experiences and opposing interests. The more homogeneous a society is, the greater the likelihood that its citizens will spontaneously bring similar assumptions to the task of interpretation. One reason for the emergence of such radically conflicting interpretations of Mao's message is that Chinese society, despite the misleading uniformity of dress, was far from homogeneous. Mao consciously promoted division and conflict, creating an artificial class system which kept class struggle alive long after classes based on real economic differences had vanished. This artificial class system was the most important source of the different interests and perspectives which shaped the contrasting interpretive frameworks of 'Royalist' Red Guards who could not believe that Mao was telling them that the Party should be their main target, and 'Rebel' Red Guards who were only too happy to believe that Mao wanted them to attack the Party.

The language of the Red Guards was heavily formulaic. In that respect it was typical, not only of Mao's China, but of all societies in which the rulers control discourse in an attempt to realize totalitarian aspirations (cf. Young 1991). Why should this be so? Why does the discourse of linguistic engineering consist so largely of formulae? The argument of this thesis suggests some answers (see, especially, ch. 4). One is that formulae reduce the very considerable processing costs involved in propagating a world view to large numbers of people. They sum up key ideological points, and their repeated use makes it easier to recall other information related to them. Repetition, too, makes them so familiar that speakers find it easier to use them than to invent new ways of conveying the same old message, while listeners have heard them so often that they decode them effortlessly.

The prevalence of formulae also reflects the fact that linguistic engineers make a very close connection between language and thought, sometimes even holding that they are one and the same thing. They believe that they must impose uniformity of language if they are to create uniformity of thought. So they pack the language with set phrases which people are expected to use whenever appropriate, believing (sometimes incorrectly) that uniform and 'correct' linguistic *form* is a sign of uniform and 'correct' *content*. They hope that the 'correct' content will sink into people's brains and transform their consciousness. As the Nazi propagandist Eugen Hadamovsky put it, 'Thought precedes action, and ... the word gives birth to thought.' (Young 1991, 120).

Linguistic engineers are also aware that making people speak in formulae gives them a common linguistic identity, unites them in collective action, and makes each individual feel empowered through solidarity with countless others. At the same time, formulaic language repels and intimidates opponents, especially when it takes the form of shouted slogans. Hadamovsky describes the effect of slogans embodying a particular world view:

> They "beat down" on the adversary, pound him, create doubt, fear, repulsion and agreement.
>
> To those who believe in these slogans they appear as positive promises of a brighter future; to them they are an intellectual and religious salvation from the blind and purely

> psychologically oriented struggle of everyday life. [Young 1991, 119-20].

Whether during the scripted theatre of the Nuremberg rallies or the orchestrated ritual of the public criticism meeting, slogans have been used to inspire the faithful and to terrify opponents.

Finally, formulae crush those who would think for themselves. Intellectuals, peasants, children, believers and unbelievers must all use the same language to say the same things. They are bound together in common subservience to the dominant ideology, and in subservience to the source and guardian of that ideology - the ruling regime. This is particularly important when the discourse fails to persuade, as it did increasingly during Mao's final years, and as it did during Hitler's. People still have to recite the formulae, and if they do not believe them, in one sense it does not matter. They acknowledge the power of their rulers, they say things which legitimate their rule, and they tell potential dissidents that even unbelievers will not support them in public. The coercive power of an enforced discourse always exceeds its ability to persuade.

It is ironic that linguistic engineering is a more effective instrument of coercion than of persuasion, for the most dedicated linguistic engineers want to re-make people's minds, to possess their souls, not merely to terrify them into outward consent. Mao, above all the others, had a genuine utopian vision which linguistic engineering was intended to serve. It was his misfortune that the power of linguistic engineering, though great, was not enough for the task. It was the Chinese people's tragedy that they were the intended beneficiaries of his utopian enterprise, and the subjects of his great linguistic experiment.

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